



ORCHARD PARK

AND OTHER WORKS

TOM FAHY

ORCHARD PARK PRESS

ST. JOHN'S ♦ VALPARAÍSO ♦ HONOLULU



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FOURTH EDITION

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“A collection is charming while a sequence is generally repulsive.”

—George Irwin

“Miscarriages of etiquette in interpersonal relationships are not always undesirable: It is from the margins that one is able to work in earnest and without interruption. To provoke chagrin in one's peers is a strategy, not a misstep, especially if the fruits of your labors are realized on the boundary between binary disciplines; the language with which your field of study is decocted is necessarily obscure. As the breadth of your insights grows, the extent of your interactions with peers in unlike fields will diminish; you will have become, for better or worse, a mystic. To the mystic, the shortcomings of objectivity and distance are apparent; he is immersed in a world betwixt that is un-mounted from the purely rational; he sacrifices status to discovery.”

—Tom Fahy

“Truth, not unlike collage, encourages and is very often improved upon by editing. Editing reinforces the interrelationships between signifiers, each of which is a representative entity. However, too often, the representation is mistaken for a truth-bearing essence. Collage does not denote, but implies the essentiality of sincerity and its qualitative bearing upon human action. And any action that aims to divert or misdirect, is a departure from sincerity. This is how we distinguish between pastiche and collage, lie and truth.”

—Tom Fahy

ANJA EHRLICHMANN, *ONE FOOT IN ATLANTIS*
A FOREWORD TO THE FOURTH EDITION OF *ORCHARD PARK*

Orchard Park, encrypted for the casual reader, is an occulted text—a book for initiates by an initiate.

Initiated into *what*?

I choose my words carefully: The comprehending reader, as opposed to the casual reader, will already have been initiated into ‘Hyperborean Esotericism.’ And while the casual reader senses that ‘O/P’ is not, in fact, a novel or literature, as such, the initiate knows it should *not* be a novel, and is *not* meant to masquerade as literature, though it *is* a masquerade.

What *is* O/P?

O/P is a Revealed Text and it is a Rune Walk: The Runes do not serve merely as chapter headings, but as 1.) Portals through which the reader is inducted 2.) As warnings, warding off those eyes for

which the occulted text was not intended and 3.) As weapons with which synchronic battle is waged.

Orchard Park, 'O/P,' is a transliteration of two sacred Runes: 1.) The Odal Rune [ǫ], which denotes 'possession/inheritance,' as in 'the possession/inheritance of an estate, or ownership,' also 'heritage' 2.) And the Peorð Rune [ƿ], which has two associations. The first association is with the pear tree, or by extension, the Irminsul tree—sometimes less a tree than a pillar. The second association is with the flute. Here is an instance when crypsis is evident, and it becomes incumbent upon the initiated reader to decrypt the intended meaning of the text. The book's title may refer to the 'heritage of Irminsul,' 'that place where the Irminsul stands,' or 'the estate of the Ash Tree (the tree on which was crucified Wotan/Odin for nine days).' It may also refer to 'the inheritance of a song,' or 'the possession of a song' the lyrics of which are contained within *Orchard (Odal) Park's (Peorð's)* leaves. Perhaps all of the interpretations are correct. If this is true, we are not reading a book, but a sacred tract or songbook, a holy work of Wotanism.



Orchard Park, a pagan book with a Cathar soul, is firmly couched in the Yuga, or Age, referred to as the Kali—a super-dense, involuted era (presaging the Age of Lead) wherein most if not all meanings are inverted; when falsification of history is de rigueur; when most human action is under the spell of and complicit in occult warfare; when it becomes the role of the initiate to restore meaning through a rigorous re-appropriation of ancient and sacred symbols, and by a methodical transmutation of language such that the Word¹ once more arms rather than stealthily disarms the intended reader/initiate.

Select stations of the Rune Walk include: The Castle (I), The Grail Quest (II), Symbology & Crypsis (III), and Disguise (IV).

In Button House, a dying Minnesänger's wrecked castle, remains the pivot around which shamble, on one arthritic foot and then another, Russell Huggins' (Fahy's) motley cast of Hobby horse-like players. Their work is of an alchemical nature, doing with high

¹ "WARDS THE MEN BY THE NEW GOD WERE MADE," pp. 327-329.

esoteric idealism what alchemists of old did with base metals, putting the lie to the illusion, defunding the fraud of modernism with merry acts of the Imagination.

II Grail Quest (Old French, “Grael”): “We will tell you without telling you. We will show you and you may one day realize that the truth is represented by the less interesting of two objects...” (⌘ / Ⓚ, 322). When one thinks of the Grail Legend, one relies on his Western materialist training and conjures a cup, or plate or tablet. The Grail/Grael is also a rite, a leaping inward in order to leap outward, and the most pedestrian of objects may be adopted to symbolize such a rite, or initiation, graduating from Maya to Pure Interior Projection—reconditioning Imagination to serve the Will, that a synchronic war with involution and its agents may be fought unflinchingly. The Grail Quest requires a Mystic Marriage—a marriage of a man with himself, or a woman with herself. And the so-called Grail itself resides wherever the Rites of Mystic Marriage are preserved. Occasionally, if the memory of the blood is sufficient, a man or woman may forgo the ancient rites, undergoing a Mystic Marriage spontaneously, thus becoming full initiates into ‘Hyperborean Esotericism.’ But more often, the Marriage must be induced in a novice.

III *Orchard Park* will make most sense to the initiate, for to him the utility of crypsis is made plain: The purpose of the book is obviated by the succession of symbols, the flowering of the Runes, the revelation of a story of courtly Love that yearns to breach time, exceeding the dominion of Kronos—of love a work of art made. And ... “a work of art is true to the extent that its actual or accidental form reflects the essential form conceived in the mind of the artist” (⌘ / Ⓚ, 283). The initiate will at once recognize the pursuit of Excelsior through the Rite of Loss, but never the loss of love profaned.

IV **Trobar Clus:** The survival of our school of esotericism requires disguise. And in order for our message to be conveyed reliably from epoch to epoch, it must find new vehicles, and it must be performed under new marquis’ with dissimilar names and forms, this year an opera, next year a masquerade. As the involution of the Kali continues apace, our rites undergo change to

IV. • FOREWORD

compensate for a nearly full despiritualization of the Earth, and those changes require new mediums through which the message may be first conveyed, then distilled, and finally transmuted. ✕ / ✕ is one such recent medium. *It may be read, or it may be understood.*

R²

Tom Shaw's days were numbered:
 he was sick, tired and humorless.
He had nothing to lose—
His mandate: comb over the literary remains
of one Russell Huggins, compulsive diarist,
and catalog no fewer than three-hundred handwritten,
 single-spaced journals...

The Urban Archaeology Department was adamant,
called Tom in the wee-hours,
rustled him from a sound sleep,
shuttled him to a bleak, windowless classroom
in the Art and Sociology building
on The University of Maryland campus;
 a room overflowing with
 cryptologists, steganographers and semagramists

² R - **RAIDÓ**, "RIDE - JOURNEY." RIDING SEEMS EASY TO EVERY WARRIOR WHILE HE IS INDOORS AND VERY COURAGEOUS TO HIM WHO TRAVERSES THE HIGH-ROADS ON THE BACK OF A STOUT HORSE. —OLD ENGLISH POEM

Were there such things—*such persons?*
 Were the appellations invented for the occasion?

The Subject died the evening before—
 a massive coronary, and young:
 he was only thirty-two.

His surviving family—an estranged sister named Katharine
 and an institutionalized grandmother,
 “would present no obstacles,”
 said Brand Moffett, department chair.



Huggins lived on the outskirts of Orchard Park,
 a scrub-infested wasteland
 scarred by unused railcar sidings and rusting buildings.
 Mangy animals patrolled the streets.
 Only one marginally formidable structure loomed,
 ringed by a falling-down iron fence—
 a brick four-story Victorian with an unassuming name:

Button House.

Huggins,
 at the time of his death, was the only tenant,
 save for a handful of skinny cats with bad teeth.

Tom arrived early on the morning of the 5th of April,
 what Katie referred to as the ‘*Lost Month.*’
 A cab rolled to a near-stop in front of Button House.
 “We’re here,” Shaw complained. “You can stop.”
 “It’s safe. Open the door and step out.
 I never put the car in park out here. Hand me the fare.”
 Tom handed the driver the fare, opened the door,
 watched the macadam roll by beside the car.
 The curb was festooned with crab-grass.
 The gutters were running with what looked like tar.
 “You can’t stop?”
 “Not a complete stop,” the cab driver confirmed. “You’ll be fine.”
 “At least walking speed,” Tom pled.
 The cab slowed down imperceptibly.

He leapt out, gripping the cab's frame, but was swept off his feet.
 He landed on his knees, skinning both.
 The cab motored away, pausing at an intersection.
 The left blinker came to life and the car turned, disappeared.

Button House—an edifice in despair—
 rotting brick, climbing skeletons of dead ivy,
 broken windows, crumbling chimneys.
 Tom mounted a step-ladder to a front door
 which hung perilously by one hinge.
 It was useless knocking.
 He nudged the door with his foot. It swung inward,
 scraping on scuffed floorboards,
 clattered to a stop against a wall
 covered with turn-of-the-last-century wallpaper: fleur-de-lis print.

He expected rats, a bad smell, fetid corpses,
 but was surprised by the neutrality of the atmosphere.
 Plaster was peeling from the walls, revealing lattice-work,
 but the floor had been swept of debris—a *neat mess*.
 Shaw knew all about neat messes.
 He lived in a neat mess himself;
 it had driven Katie mad.



The University was greedy—
 it sought to amass the effects of backward literary estates;
 it responded to all rumors of treasure, plundered, didn't share;
 its pirates were subcontracted.
 It didn't want to get knee-deep in the expeditions itself;
 it wanted to reserve the right
 to deny foreknowledge of an estate's contents.

But Button House seemed only to be peripherally
 on their agenda—on the very bottom of their wish-list.
Seemed, I say, as they were making an overt effort
 to foster the illusion that this particular robbery
 was being held at one or two or three arm-lengths.
 Or maybe they wanted to throw the forlorn husband
 of the former Urban Archaeology Chair a bone,

keep him occupied:

*The University hasn't forgotten you, or your dead wife,
her contributions, her inestimable value to the department,
students and culture. Look at the interest we take in your welfare.*



A stairway with a heavily-worn carpet rose to a landing.
Tom climbed it, testing each step.
There was no railing.
On the landing stood a suitcase
and next to the suitcase a pair of shoes
into which had been stuffed socks.
A chandelier with one bulb glided overhead.
He felt the wall for a switch,
found one and the bulb came to life.

Hallways extended to the left and right
and another stairway marched into a black hole.
The hallway to the left was lined with ledgers, notebooks,
some spiral, some saddle-stitched, all colors, sizes.
That was the way to Huggins' lair.



Katie had worn the pants—the house pants,
the family pants,
the professional pants,
the money pants.
And Tom simply hung on.
He loved her terribly,
but he didn't have the initiative-bone
or gene
or faculty
or disposition.
She wanted him to stay home, not feel guilty,
research,
write,
think,
contemplate,
cook when he could, *clean*.

It was an unusual arrangement—
Lifestyle, as they say—she in the big pants, the *alpha-girl*,
 while he stayed in his study, doing what he loved,
 trying desperately not to engage,
 to just do as his instincts dictated.

Maybe Huggins had been that way, too...

 Maybe he was ugly, a brute, distasteful, violent and disfigured.

 Maybe a woman like Katie tried to save him—
 save him from Button House, the warehouse district,
 from his own mind, from disease, from compulsion,
 from Orchard Park.

Time would tell.



The hallway was long,
 pocked with misshapen doorways,
 every room dark, unfurnished and wallpapered similarly,
 with fleur-de-lis or damask patterns.

One room, unlike the rest, was furnished.

A hulk of a desk, barely visible in the meager light
 shed by the only working streetlamp on the block,
 stood in the center of the room.

Shaw dug into his jacket, produced a flashlight,
 trained the beam into the murky space.

As in the hallway, so too here—
 tall stacks of notebooks, journals, diaries, ledgers.

In the far corner, a bed.

On the walls hung black and white photographs,
 and Polaroids leached of pigment, too long in the sun,
 or under interrogation lamps or firelight...

Shaw found a switch, flicked it.

A ceiling lamp came to life, revealed a world,
 a startling world, brimming filing cabinets,
 shelves sagging under the weight of books,
 one full shelf busting at the seams with alphabetized 45s,
 and in the center, commanding, formidable,
 bulging on legs thick as an elephant's, stood Huggins' desk.

On the desk were spread papers, a pyramid of cloth-bound books,
two laptops, one newish and one old, brick-like.

That he felt affection for this room,
Tom Shaw couldn't deny;
it was made-to-order: he could work here.



How did Huggins bide his time?
On what was he working?

Shaw set the flashlight on the desk,
moved to the wall, leaned close,
his nose pressing against the glass
of a multitude of framed photos.

Who were these people?

Many of the photos were ancient
but most were under thirty years old,
judging from the clothes the subjects wore—
the rugby shirts, tight jeans, tube socks,
silkscreen t-shirts, bowl haircuts.

Out of the past, from behind glass,
beamed faces with painted-on smiles,
sparkling eyes, yellow hair, small ears, proud cheekbones.
The men, all composites of one another,
had broad shoulders, thick chests,
were tall, had thick eyebrows, curly hair.
The women were fresh, exuded health,
had perky breasts that poked through their t-shirts,
pale blue eyes, smiles that dominated one side of their face.
And the children, also clearly spawn of the same family,
bursting with energy,
ready to dive headfirst out of the photographs.

Where was Huggins?

A gray tiger-cat, well-fed,

not like the neighborhood cats,
 wandered into the room,
 rubbed against Tom's leg.
 He picked it up, scratched it's head.
 The cat purred; he placed the cat on the desk.

What did the University want with this man,
 this room, this life, these books and journals?
 Shaw would find out.
 He would dig, sort, read, catalog.
 He would smoke like a banshee, sit in a yellow cloud,
 ashes piling up at his feet, reading, documenting.

He suspected the job killed his wife,
 inclined as she was, like him, to smoke compulsively,
 especially while working, not eating, barely breathing,
 only seeing, thinking, digesting ideas, condensing them,
 desperate for hidden meanings.
 She was so good, so astute, keen, excitable, and breathless.
 He'd never, not even here in Button House,
 not with the fear instilled in him
 by the bearded cryptographers filling his sails,
 ever match her pure, easy enthusiasm.
 But he'd do it, make her a gift³ of the work of
 one Russell Huggins.

³ OUR SYSTEM IS ONE IN WHICH EXPERIENCE IS CONDITIONAL AND CONTINGENT—
 CONDITIONAL AND CONTINGENT UPON CONFORMANCE TO RELATIVE CUSTOMS AND
 STATUTORY RIGHTS.

PRIVILEGE ISSUES FROM COERCIVE POWERS THAT OBSERVE STATUTORY RIGHTS.

IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT WE DISTINGUISH BETWEEN PRIVILEGE, WHICH IS THE OUTCOME
 OF A TRANSACTION, AND THE *GIFT*, WHICH IS VOLUNTARY. WHILE PRIVILEGE IS IMPLIED
 DEBT TO A COERCIVE POWER, THE TRIBUTE ONE SYMBOLICALLY PAYS IN THE ACT OF
 GIFT-GIVING IS SELF-REFLEXIVE: THE GIFT CANNOT BE BROKERED; THE GIFT IS IMMUNE
 FROM DEBT; THE GIFT CANNOT BE LOANED AT INTEREST; THE GIFT IS NEITHER A
 LIABILITY NOR AN OBLIGATION; THE GIFT IS NOT CAPITAL.

THE ACT OF GIFT-GIVING ISSUES FROM NATURAL LAW, AND HENCE IS INALIENABLE,
 UNIVERSAL AND INCOERCIBLE.

Tom coughed—a hacking cough—
wiped his nose on his sleeve, rubbed his eyes.
He took in the room.
The ceiling was sagging and stained.
Dirty curtains hung limp beside the windows,
pulled into bunches with shoestring.
A wooden swivel chair stood behind the desk—
the monolith with fat-lady legs.

He sat in it,
exhaled a ragged, wheezy breath,
put his feet up and addressed the room,
“Where do we start, Russell?
Where did *you* start?”

There was only one way to find out:
determine if there was order in the chaos,
a number-system, a Dewey-system, ciphers,
recurring patterns, dates,
something from which he could extrapolate a sequence—
find some page, one page (*Once upon a time...*).

Was that necessary, advisable,
to seek order when perhaps order was not intended,
or where order does not exist?
What would Katie do? What *did* Katie do?
He didn’t know. She was methodical.
He wasn’t.

He heard a motor, heard the motor cut, heard a door close.
He peered out Huggins’ grimy window.
A sedan sat parked across the street.
A black man in a long brown jacket stood beside it,
a Styrofoam cup smoldering in his hand;
Shaw waved. The man in the brown jacket didn’t wave back.

This is my last hurrah, Shaw thought to himself,
coughing into his fist:

I have nothing to lose.

*They want the husband of the ghost of Katie Shaw
to resurrect from paper a man that the world forgot,
or more probable, never knew.*

“You must be *someone*,” Tom Shaw said to the room.

“By the way, your funeral is Thursday—
in case you wanted to hover,
see who comes. The cats, maybe.”

Rain started to patter the window, drum on the tin eaves,
circulate throughout the bones of the house,
dribble from the ceiling.

Russell had been prepared.

The sound of water dripping into pans
in the room and up and down the hallway
produced a maddening, terrifying chorus:

The Button House Tin Pan Band.

It was time to dig.

Shaw didn’t want to touch the things
on which Huggins had been working last;
he wanted to touch the past,
see how his handwriting had evolved,
if it evolved, or devolved,
maybe turned into something illegible.

The beginning: *where was it?*

It was a riddle: defense agencies—
powerful, interested, but unwilling to dirty their own hands.
Was Huggins a liability?
They could burn the evidence,
the house in which the evidence was stored,
drop a bomb down a chimney,
poison the cats,
turn the rotting bricks into flour.

Why didn’t they?

Shaw went to the hallway,
 looked at the suitcase, the shoes...
 Was Huggins planning a trip?
 Where was he going?
 Did he have a friend on the other side of the world,
 someone to whom he wrote letters, a lover—
 was he preparing for a tryst?
 Was he involved in an international intrigue,
 or maybe a local one?
 Maybe the cats were conspiring against him.

His shoes, unlaced, waiting...

Did he work barefoot?
 If so, Tom would work barefoot.
 He kicked off his sneakers, peeled off his socks.
 Is this how Huggins did it, pattered around Button House,
 emptying pan after pan of rainwater?
 Maybe he sat typing, scribbling, jotting, all in the nude,
 bunching and flexing his toes.

Katie would be knee-deep by now,
 slogging, interested and drawing insightful conclusions,
 making notes in her flawless print,
 a cigarette hanging on her dry lip.

Shaw marched to the end of the hall opposite the landing.
 It was dark, crawling with shadows.
 From the corners came the unmistakable odor of cat urine.
 He reached for a bundle of notebooks in various states of decay,
 lugged them back to Huggins' desk,
 lit a cigarette
 and began.



PUBLISHER’S NOTE: *The following is a fairly faithful decoction, decipherment and distillation of the life, times, loves, and record of such by one Russell Huggins, as compiled, edited and formatted by Tom Shaw.*

EDITOR’S NOTE: *The First, Second, Third, and Fourth Orchard Park Press Editions involved careful consideration of the privacy interests of individuals mentioned, referenced or identified in this work. In very few cases, names have not been released because doing so would constitute an invasion of privacy. As for the remainder, the invasion was warranted.*

I, UNFORTUNATELY, AM RUSSELL HUGGINS

Out of relative obscurity I come,
and so too shall I return to that obscurity,
but only after I have taken a moment to pause,

⁴ ⚡ - ODAL, “HERITAGE – ESTATE – POSSESSION.” AN ESTATE IS VERY DEAR TO EVERY MAN, IF HE CAN ENJOY THERE IN HIS HOUSE WHATEVER IS RIGHT AND PROPER IN CONSTANT PROSPERITY. —OLD ENGLISH POEM

stand before you wearing bed-rags, with uncombed hair,
 with a three-day beard, all in order to address you,
 my dear reader, that I might convey a portion
 of those stirring morsels of thought
 of which I have become the recipient.
 And I realize that precious is the time allotted each man
 and woman, and that it is not my wish to detain you,
 to charm, to bewitch.

No.

Rather, it is my wish to take your arm in mine
 for but a few hours that we might stroll.
 There is much to be said and so little time;
 I beg your patience.



b., January 2, 1971—
 the same day of the Ibrox disaster, the second one,
 66 dead, 200 injured.
 Also the same year that David Duff was born.
 Shortly after my birth, my family relocated to Orchard Park,
 a suburb on the outskirts of Baltimore, once an apple orchard.
 It was a middle-class suburb with an ugly underbelly,
 known for its seedy hustlers, dirty politics,
 back-alley knife fights and colorful thugs;
 a suburb containing its share of whorehouses and cabarets.

It was a violent place.

Everyone was someone—
 everyone was a storyteller, money or no money.
 My father, Brian Todd Huggins,
 was a lawyer and teacher
 whose personal beliefs were founded in Transcendental Fascism,⁵
 which explains the perverse appeal of Orchard Park.
 Mother, Margaret Ann Ferguson Huggins,
 was a proud woman, descended from a long line of civil servants,

⁵ REFER TO APPENDIX A, “TRANSCENDENTAL FASCISM”

and if she is to be believed, ‘freedom fighters.’
 For what kind of freedom they were fighting
 and from what kind of bondage they were fleeing...
 ...is anybody’s guess.

Nevertheless, the house was ornamented
 with soldierly artifacts: swords, uniforms
 and tin-type portraits of bony men in Confederate gray.

I loved them both fiercely.

My father taught me philosophy and my mother, dead at 40,
 taught me that affection wasn’t in philosophy’s jurisdiction.
 My mother spoke and read several languages,
 for my maternal grandfather, Colonel Russell Ferguson,
 had married a Frenchwoman named Eleanor Payton,
 a woman fluent in no less than four continental languages.
 The Colonel was shot and killed in 1956
 and Grandma Payton engraved in my memory
 tales of the Colonel’s military exploits
 in Bzura, Mlawa, and Lubelski.
 She read me French magazines.
 So multilingual was the household,
 that I was scarcely aware that English
 was the official language of Greater Baltimore.

Katharine was (*is*) my younger sister—
 younger by two years,
 never a friend but often an ally.
 We had many imaginary playmates:

Augen, Sylvia and the Magical-Mystical Man.

We haunted the labyrinthine alleys of Orchard Park,
 the library, the rambling, unkempt gardens, the zoo.
 We spent hours taunting the tigers.
 Our bond, tenebrous as it was,
 due largely to our feeling singularly alien—
 we were bookish, near-sighted
 and grossly unprepared for the harsh-realities
 awaiting us in a grown-up world.

I was expected to enter into law, or teach.
 Grandma Payton suggested linguistics but I demurred.
 “It is tacitly understood,” Katharine proclaimed,
 “that you will follow in the footsteps of your father,
 now an invalid.”

But I chose to write, poems at first, then prose,
 from morning until night, always with a badly chewed pencil,
 fantastical stories, mostly about cats.

Upon my mother’s death,
 my father’s health declined rapidly.
 “School is no place for a child!” he’d rail.
 Katharine and I took our lessons at his bedside,
 graduating to what he called factory schools
 only after he was dead and buried, eaten alive by sorrow:

“The Bolsheviks killed your mother and me!”

I wore thick glasses,
 couldn’t get the hang of the factory school style of dress
 and was picked on mercilessly.
 I found myself in fights,
 possessed of that ancestral warrior honor instilled in me
 by my mother and grandmother.
 I loathed school.
 I became accustomed to defeat.



Relief arrived in 1985 when we, Katharine and I,
 left with Grandma Payton for Europe, settling in Geneva—
 a hotbed for the Payton clan.

We spent four years at the Lycée Montaigne,
 learned Latin and German.
 Katharine mastered French.

The student body,
 being of a higher caliber than that to which we were accustomed,
 accepted us, embraced us and offered us friendship.
 And it appeared Grandma Payton

had been foretelling my fate in Orchard Park,
 as I soon developed a keen interest in
 and chose to study linguistics in earnest,
 seeking a tutor in George Irwin,
 an adjunct at International University
 and a specialist in psycholinguistics.

These were the halcyon days.

They came too early, did not last—*could not last*.

Grandma Payton died.

We stayed with relatives, distant cousins, aunts and uncles.

They suffered us well, or seemed to.

I felt a perfect burden.

It was 1989.

I was finished at Montaigne, was eager to leave Geneva
 and return to the States in order to study linguistics.

But it would mean leaving Katharine.

I chose to stay, endure.

George Irwin left International for MIT.

He had become a dear friend and mentor.

We wrote regularly,

but the frequency with which his replies arrived tapered,
 sputtered

and finally stopped.

Desperate, I exchanged my obsession with languages
 with an old passion: *writing*.

I met David Duff in 1990 at the Café Toepffer,

a slum for writers and the epicenter

of a burgeoning literary circle

populated by hosts of as yet unpublished,
 un-publishable and angry bards.

A large portion of the circle was composed
 of the children of US expats.

We talked into the night, argued,

set little fires at one another's feet, ideas for kindling.

But while the other members sought new

and better methods for full Europeanization,

I soon grew dissatisfied;

the talking was relentless, wearying.

Duff, son of a Glasgow solicitor,
 on what he called the first third of a pan-European tramp,
 frequent drop-in to the Café Toepffer, agreed.
 We decamped to a garage in Vézenaz,
 began the first cycle of what was to become
 a recurring enterprise over the next decade.
 Our first collaboration
 was on a three-volume set of essays and poems,
 most paying lip-service to pet obsessions:
 linguistics, fascism and film-theory.
 We made a meager effort at selling our handmade books
 but we soon grew embarrassed of our own work,
 our sophomoric ideas, our naiveté.

We burned everything, toasted our failure, started over,
 and decided there was more currency in pure feelings
 than in abstract ideas.

How wrong we were...

× **121202MD: THE FUTURE**

GEORGE IRWIN: ELUCIDATED

He was a mild man. In the evening he read Carl Sandburg. His favorite poem was ‘Red-headed Restaurant Cashier.’ He read that poem over and over again. But at times like these, when it was raining, and cool, he didn’t have the heart for Carl Sandburg. Instead he would read something harder, cruder, like Eliot, or even Thomas Mann, whom he didn’t particularly like, but who made him feel disciplined to read.

At times like these, when the house was too quiet for comfort, when the newspaper arrived sopping wet, he would retreat to the den, which was books, a chair and a long, narrow desk. A lamp stood atop it. As they died, he continually replaced the bulbs with ones of lower wattages, until now, it burned with a jaundiced, sickly yellow glow—30 watts through a thick, ochre shade.

Sitting by the window, a copy of *Death in Venice* on his lap, he studied the shelves that wrapped around three of the room’s four walls. They held the books he’d accumulated since he was thirteen,

an age he recalled was unlucky not only as it was an unlucky number but, because of all of the untold misfortunes that beset a thirteen-year-old. Yet, those misfortunes were the reward for enduring the first twelve years of one's life in practical peace. Without his glasses he couldn't read the spines, but he knew the titles by their shapes and colors.

As for *Death in Venice*, he never read it, as he never read a handful of others, like the ones he piled on the coffee table. It was something to hold, to talk about. Few, if any, read *Death in Venice*, and yet, it remained a book about which people liked to talk, without understanding it, or wanting to; without enjoying, or even liking it. *Death in Venice* was a prop, for him and others. But that wasn't what was bothering the man.



His name was *George Irwin*. Had it not been for his name, George Irwin believed, he might have wedded by then, but truth be told, he really didn't blame his poor fortune on his name. Rather, he blamed Fortune herself. In *his* book, Fate was a woman, and Death was a woman and Fortune was a woman, too. They all, in fact, wore the same face but different costumes. Fate wore a white gown, and Death a shroud (of course), and Fortune, she wore a jester's costume. This is as he had always visualized it, and so he would continue to visualize it.



From the den he walked into the kitchen, leaving Mann's book on the long desk. In the kitchen, where he'd left it, was a plate on which lay a slice of banana bread. He had buttered it earlier when the bread was warm, and he had watched the butter melt, soaking the thin slice. George didn't like the way the banana bread made him feel, just sitting there, a butter knife balancing on the arc of the plate, so he left it, to be dealt with later, maybe when the sun had set.

From the kitchen he went into the mudroom, put on a rain jacket, his boots and a baseball cap. Outside, the rain bouncing off the bill of his cap and coursing down his face, he walked up the drive and into the woods, making a b-line through the thickets to the deer run that led to the lake road. Much of the path, which was muddy, ran

downhill, so he ‘skied’ on the bottoms of his boots. He held onto passing branches for support. At the bottom of the hill he ducked under the skirt of a fur tree, knelt and took from an inside pocket of his jacket a pack of cigarettes, which he did not normally smoke. Against the tree bark he struck a match and held the quivering flame to the end of the cigarette. It ignited and he inhaled.

On the lake road he walked south, towards town, thinking about Fortune, dressed as a jester. The previous morning, he had read something in the paper that had almost, he felt, cured him alive. He still felt, a day later, half-pickled, tanned, and leathery. He had been reading the paper passively, sitting in a little visited corner of the library where the windows were smoked and the bookshelves were covered with a layer of dust. He regarded newspapers as he regarded *Death in Venice*. Papers, like the Mann book, weren’t necessarily a cover, but were a smokescreen in the event of boredom. Newspapers gave one the look of a busy person, just as a Mann book imparted to one the look of an intelligent person, if not a pretentious one. So he was reading a newspaper, or holding it, so as to appear respectably bored in privacy. He was turning the pages passively, lending half an eye to the weather section, a third of an eye to the obituaries, and less than that to the rest when all of the disparate parts of his eyes suddenly coalesced at the bottom of section C, page 3—*Death Notices*:

Allayne Ashby, 33, died after being strangled by her clothing while driving a bumper car at Glen Echo Park’s Bumper Car Pavilion on Friday. The woman was with her niece and nephew, when the scarf she was wearing became lodged in the bumper car’s wheels and tightened around her neck. Emergency Services were called to the scene at 3:00 PM and she was flown to Mercy Medical Center where she was pronounced dead. An investigation into bumper car safety at Glen Echo is pending.

× 121302MD: *THE FUTURE*

THE KNELL MEMORIAL HOME AND GARDEN

Nestled in the Warehouse District, Orchard Park, Baltimore County, the Knell Memorial Home and Garden is a century-old, family-owned and operated landmark. The estate, formerly a hop farm, belongs to a region to whose natural aspects its people have been obstinately partial. Orchard Park, once admired for her

singular beauty—verdant, pristine and pastoral—has lost her complexion, her figure, her reputation, and her self-respect; and yet, despite its overall decrepitude, has not lost her distinction. In spite of the doom and decay, the monstrous misfortunes and the desperation which have befallen Orchard Park and her people, there remain certain saving graces of which the Knell Memorial Home and Garden is an example.

Within and without, the memorial home and garden convey a sense of stillness, an absence of momentum. It is as an arrival by water. Inside, on the lichen-bitten stone walk, there is an unearthly hush. A gnarly tree lends you her arm, and you are overwhelmed by the slackening, the gentle bumping, and uncoordinated creeping, behind the furry walls, beneath the lighted windows. Somewhere a fountain gurgles, and in the half-light, statues of Pluto and Hades, Persephone and Neptune.

The memorial home is a veritable bastard of architecture, enjoying no singular theme, but rather assembled from a queer blueprint cross-pollinated with a host of unlike styles: Bauhaus, Georgian, Victorian and Gothic; Italianate, Russian Revival, Prairie and Postmodern. At first, it is disarming, not altogether pleasing or inviting, but one eventually yields to the beast, as it begs pity from its guests.

The Knell Memorial Home and Garden is a getaway that offers respite from the worries of the flesh. Visitors are welcomed, but arrangements may be made for permanent residence.

× **121302MD:** *THE FUTURE*

“If you cannot write poems, write stories. And if you cannot write stories, write novels. And if not novels, then paint. And if you cannot or will not paint—if you have no arms, no eyes—then stay inside of your head, because you can be free there, too.”

—Russell Huggins

George G. Irwin
MIT Linguistics and Philosophy
77 Massachusetts Avenue, 33-A808
Cambridge, MA 02139

George,

Do not cry out for reason in the dark when instinct is closest at hand, as instinct too will serve you well, in its turn, *in the place of reason*. Instinct is not primitive. It is what remains when the heart has sought out in the soul of a man what is intrinsically worthless.

Go-
Into early autumn,
That is goldenrod,
Mothers and sons
And yellow pastures.
Go-
Into the puncture,
And let him, your father,
Squeeze from it the pain.

-Russell

× **121402MD:** *THE FUTURE*

The Remainder prepare to convene at Bethany Beach to spread Allayne's ashes—Katharine from Alexandria, David Duff from Glasgow, I in a rental from Baltimore, Whistler already on the Eastern Shore, maybe Irwin—*probably Irwin*. I long to see their familiar faces, to embrace them, to wrap my arms around their bodies, plant kisses on their cheeks and foreheads. Our lives are short. We can count our breaths as they climb the stile from the barnyard into the meadow. And we can watch them, feathered, alighting on the gentle rises and liting on the grassy slopes until they disappear into the blurry tufts of grass clinging to the horizon, fists and broad columns of smoke-colored clouds crammed overhead. Then we are left with the emptiness that precedes our next, heroic breath—

Exhale,
 Ruffle the leaves
 of the wild apple trees.

× 122598MD

Dear Russell,

Cipher: Allentown

Herein you will find enclosed a new cryptogram. Any thoughts you may have regarding structural improvements would be welcome:

1.A.) I have come to the conclusion that to write does not mean to dazzle with lyrical acrobatics, but to tell a story, plain and simple. In this manner, I will tell you one now, one you already know well:

1.B.) For the better part of four years I have walked to the office on Massachusetts Ave. Only once have I accepted a ride. That ride was from my wife Elaine. She died three years and 30 minutes ago during the delivery of our first child. Our first and last child died three days later. She missed her mommy. I did, too.

⁶ | - ISAZ, "ICE." ICE IS VERY COLD AND IMMEASURABLY SLIPPERY; IT GLISTENS AS CLEAR AS GLASS AND MOST LIKE TO GEMS; IT IS A FLOOR WROUGHT BY THE FROST, FAIR TO LOOK UPON. —OLD ENGLISH POEM

I walk to work and I no longer accept rides. I live in a part of the world where the winters are long and the summers are short. When it is warm and sticky, I wear linen and drape my jacket over my shoulder. When it rains, I carry an umbrella. The terrain is hilly and it keeps my legs thin and strong. The scenery is never dull. The broad-leaved trees stand like exclamation points. The Aspens stand erect like London Guards. The apple trees, swarthy and unkempt, remind me of drunkards. I like the drunkards the best.

I do not suffer company on my walks. About solitude, I am very particular. Occasionally I am tailed by a cat or dog. This does not bother me; they are an exception.

The streets I walk are many. Each morning they welcome me back as though I were an old friend. Many years ago, at the end of Brookline, there lived a beautiful young woman in a small, peeling Tudor. She had three children. Each morning she stood in a housecoat on a set of crumbling steps and saw her children off to school. She would smile and wave, then she would whisper something to her children and they would wave, too. Soon after, they moved. I stopped walking on Brookline.

Ever,

George

× 122898MD

George,

The Allentown Cipher works fine, although rough around the edges. I have too little energy to devote to the particulars. My apologies. Ashby is in town, was just on the telephone and wants to meet. We are overwhelmed by the *details*. She says it might be better if we met in our imaginations.

I am frantic to write all of this down before I am dead, before I am covered with moles, before I've lost my hair. I was sure that I was going to die last night. I was afraid that my heart would explode before I could call for help. I could feel the pain and panic creep into my chest and I wanted to cry out and it was hopeless. The world slept. I was alone with my anxiety.

-Russell

× 122998MD

ELLCOTT CITY CURSES

Sandwiched between running glass—
 Glass older than this city—
 And over-painted moldings,
 I think of you, a figment,
 A blur between passages.
 And I have to wonder...
 Why *here*,
 Behind rugged plaster,
 Thinking through a season of flat hops, moldy wheat?
 I wonder of what you are made—
 Of how many oak doors with heavy latches;
 Of how many landslides
 Churning up gold flakes and old patent leather shoes...
 I wonder ... as the fanged bit of morning
 Burrows into the rear-end of night,
 If you have sleep on your side,
 Or if you even have the comfort of madness.

× 123098MD

THIMBLEFUL OF BLACK

To do something great,
 All a man needs is a small room.
 There, if he sits long enough,
 Caring little, remembering much,
 He can accomplish anything.
 A room like that is a place where decisions are made;
 Where grave losses are confronted;
 Where resolve is forged.
 Maybe the solitude will be too much.
 It is hard to say.
 I am in such a room now.
 I have not reached a verdict.
 Sleep does not come easily.

× 123198MD

WHEN WE WERE GOOD

I miss you dearly,
 Can still smell you,
 Your aura a thin film clinging to my skin,
 Echoes of your hands in my hair, on my head,
 Your voice in my ears,
 My arms pulling you closer, closer...
 Listening to the thrum of your heart in the mattress,
 Merging with you in our flannel cocoon,
 In the kitchen and on the sofa...
 Drinking tea, eating,
 Our dreams distilled in the air,
 Soaking in each other's eyes and smiles...
 As the Universe is my witness,
 We were two mint bees
 on an early morning flower.

× 010399MD

Dear Russell,

Cipher: Pittsburgh

On a bicycle in front of the Hampshire,⁷ I elect two girls into my company. Both are dressed alike and eating donuts. Wasting no time, I smile and ask them their names. They tell me and exchange bewildered looks, but I don't remember to listen. They are uncomfortable. The passing cars slow to watch them, beep their horns, hoot. This strikes me as unusual. I leave them, cycling to the pawnshop. Bonnie and her husband are in the window, arguing over a display. I stop, tap on the glass.

Ever,

George

⁷THE HAMPSHIRE HOTEL. SEE, *THE BEEKEEPER, A NOVELLA*, PP.142, 144, 145, 161, 179

× **010599MD**

Irwin,

Cipher: Pittsburgh

Here is my belated answer to your cryptogram of 122598:

Esteban, the suave Latino with the butterfly collar and rubber form-fitting pants, is playing house with the girls from the neighborhood, dressing them up in his dead wife's costumes, wigs, stilettos. He's down the hall, on the landing, preening, standing sideways in front of the mirror, humming "Candida." Downstairs, the girls form a coterie in the foyer, the tiles wiggling under their heels.

-Russell

× **010999MD**

HOURS UNDER FIRE

I could tell you what I have seen,
The places to which I have gone.
I could tell you about the pains, trials, and fires,
Disappointments, terrors and fevers;
I could tell you about losses, accidents,
Bad weather, the searing anger;
I could tell you what I know.
And I won't. I don't need to.
I see more clearly now
Than I have ever seen before.
It's the reason I was forced to come back.
I have said it before and I will say it again:
There will never be a time
When you are unloved by me,
But *this* time, I will not try to possess you.
This time, so great is my love
That I will not resist
Your intention to release me;
I will do the one thing

That I have fought time and again,
 Lifetime after lifetime: *I will let you go.*
 You are my attachment on Earth;
 The attachment for which
 I have died and been reborn,
 over and over.

× **011094MD:** *THE PAST*

BETHANY BEACH: *BABY SHOWER*

“I’m going to say goodbye to Katharine, then we can go.”
 “Okay.”

Russell stood by the open door to the atrium. He could see tables piled with cold meat and sweets. Two pudgy kids with oversized hands stood guarding a crystal punch bowl. Another, smaller than they, stood staring at Russell, pulling on her golden braids. Russell studied her until blood rushed into his cheeks—until his armpits were wet.

Katharine was in the garden under a trellis bending with wisteria. She sat with little Brian Todd Cairns curled up in her arms. He lay there with astonished buffed blue eyes as guests paid him tribute. Unopened presents and envelopes were stacked around the legs of Katharine’s wicker chair.

“Give your nephew a kiss, Russell. And me one, too.”

“David—”

“Yes, I know. Look, baby has Grandpa’s eyes.”

“Allayne’s in the car.”

“Russell, if you see Duff, tell him there are no hard feelings. It’d be nice if he got to know Brian,” She handed me a letter, “He gave me this.”

“I’m holding up traffic.” The tribute train had begun to bunch, back up into the restaurant.

“Don’t be angry with him, Russell. We’re not—not anymore. I think he knows something that we don’t—”

“He always did, Katharine.” He turned to go.

Addressing the back of his head, Katharine called, “Drive carefully.”

He heard her, but didn’t stop. Crossing the atrium, he noticed the chubby boys still guarding the punch bowl and the little girl, still

teasing her braids. She followed him into the restaurant with her eyes.

What a creepy kid, Russell thought.

In the car, Allayne kissed Russell on the cheek, the car rolling before he had closed the door. “Babies—do you like them?”

“Sure,” Russell said.

Allayne, eyes glued to the road, was fishing in a box of tapes with her free hand, produced one. She popped it into the tape deck. A song began and she cranked the volume until the tune disintegrated into static, white noise, heat.

× **011199MD**

THAT IT MIGHT CLAIM YOU

I hope sleep has chosen to claim you,
 To take you back to her warm, close cave,
 To bundle you in soft furs,
 To surround you with the flicker of firelight;
 And I hope that in your sleep
 You have found some respite—
 A seal-skin smooth calm

× **011399MD**

HOURS, ADDENDUM

Paper, burned by dark water—
 Morning, soaked in pink embers—
 These words, this speech,
 These thoughts—
 This roasted ink,
 Under cold stars,
 Knowing,
 Doing nothing, feeling much,
 This anxious heart

× 011499MD

“It is the duty of PBA members to explain to public opinion, clearly and courageously, a certain number of facts that are forgotten with time. The first of these is that there is no PBA without the eviction of the amateurs and the expropriation of their bowling alleys.”

—James Trainer

“In the 21st century, it is evident that only Whites are denied freedom of assembly, and the PBA remains the only organization that defends the exclusive association of Whites. Hence, your best defense against those that would prosecute thought-crimes is membership in a bowling league”

—James Trainer

JAMES TRAINER, FORMER TENANT, 1ST FLOOR, ON HIS DEPARTURE FROM BUTTON HOUSE:

Behold the countenance of a man that knows he has lost something that he will never recover. He alone knows that nature is not as simple as we would like to believe. But he will be the first to forgive nature her whims, because like man, she is fallible. Like man, sometimes she knows not what she does: she gets caught up in the moment, she sleeps while the phone rings, she hesitates when action is asked for...



Who is James Trainer?

James A. Trainer began his PBA career in 1977 when he won two tournaments and Sporting News PBA Rookie of the Year honors. Trainer went on to win the Firestone Tournament of Champions in 1982 before leaving regular tour action for a few years in the mid-80s. After coming back full-time on the Tour at the age of 36, Trainer added four more titles before collecting his 20th PBA victory at the 1992 Firestone. Astonishingly, after being inducted into the PBA Hall of Fame at the annual Firestone dinner preceding the 1994 Tournament of Champions, Trainer went on to win the Firestone for a record third time later in the week. Trainer, who served as President of the PBA in 1993-94, finished with 14 PBA Tour titles and more than \$1,00,000 in career earnings.

× 011599MD

"I have a sneaking suspicion that Being does not require justification and that absent the constructs, truth and belief, It persists, with or without our informed consent."

—George Irwin

ESTEBAN'S CONFESSION: *WE, THE CROOKED*

There is a particularly good, peculiar strain of grape whose vine dies before they are ripe. However, they are not picked like ordinary grapes; they fall from the vine on their own. There on the ground, they begin to ferment in the sun, growing smaller as they wilt. On the second day, vintners gather them into baskets. The grapes in turn are stored in a cool place until white with mold. They are then heaped into vats, pressed into a uniform juice and decanted for finishing and final fermentation. The grapes make tart wine with an aftertaste of wild preserves.

We are like these grapes: *We, the crooked.*

× 011699MD

WHEN WE WERE GOOD, II

Reddish-brown currents
Hooked around the bends of her ears;
Errant strands forming fine tracery on her cheeks;
Delicate, bourbon-colored eyes;
Indelicate gardener's hands, toughened by hard springtime dirt,
By all the lifting that a mother is wont to do.
This is the puzzle of collarbone,
Hips, muslin-sash-eyelids and painted toes
that you love.



8

× **011702MD:** *THE FUTURE*

**BOLDNESS, AUDACITY, EFFRONTERY, AND THE MAKING OF
THE DOCUMENTARY FILM, OR: *HOW I DEVELOPED AN
OVERNIGHT OBSESSION WITH DOCUMENTARY FILMS AND
LEARNED TO COPE WITH THE UNTIMELY DEATH OF ALLAYNE
ASHBY***

That rule which determines the overall efficacy of the documentary film, employed at once by the filmmaker and that extrinsic body of critics composed of the popular and professional markets, is presumption. The filmmaker presumes that his presence is warranted on the grounds that he operate at a remove from his subjects. The critic and the nonprofessional market, for both of which the documentary is promoted, presume that the filmmaker

⁸ † - **LAGUZ**, “WATER – LAKE – LEEK.” THE OCEAN SEEMS INTERMINABLE TO MEN, IF THEY VENTURE ON THE ROLLING BARK AND THE WAVES OF THE SEA TERRIFY THEM AND THE COURSER OF THE DEEP HEED NOT ITS BRIDLE. —OLD ENGLISH POEM

has not taken liberties that would undermine their recreational or expert exegesis of the material. Both factions, the filmmaker and his audience, actively engage one another from behind the lines of their respective disciplines. They participate in a dialogue that tests the integrity of the filmmaker's primary incentives, intentions, and motivations, and the critic's interpretations as a reflection of his understanding of the cultural rubrics and context into which the film was introduced.

The critic and the nonprofessional market, in as much as they are overtly and covertly responsible for the promotion—positive or negative—and subsequent reputation of a documentary film, are a force that can have a potentially undue and retrogressive affect on the production of a documentary. That the critic and the nonprofessional market possess this influence, suggests that the filmmaker does not execute a film without considering whether or not his film will have popular appeal. The fact that only rarely a filmmaker will approach the documentary unhampered by views from without, and with the intention of capturing reality as his subject matter construe it, persuades the critic to presume that his motivation is not without potentially corrupting influences. The critic, then, represents an odious obstacle to the making of a documentary that does not disenfranchise its subjects without first being manipulated by its producers, endowments, or patrons. Each, in turn, answers to the professional and nonprofessional markets alike, operate perfunctorily, and assume the role of puppet master. Moreover, the selfsame obstacle rebounds to the audience, members of which take the integrity of the filmmaker and his subject matter for granted.

To an unassuming audience, the film represents reality as they have been conditioned to interpret it. The camera, like the eye, presumably is incapable of falsifying seen-reality; the audience is trusting. It then is the responsibility of the critic to appraise the intrinsic worth of a documentary on the basis of its overall objectivity, its cultural relevance, and its authenticity. In no way is the critic confined to these guidelines, as in the final analysis, rarely by a good guideline did a critic reveal the intent of a film.

More often, the critic, and even the casual viewer uncover the meaning/s of a documentary by other, less obvious means. The metaphysical approach, for instance, visits a viewer at once, rather than in increments, as by the analytical method, which regards a

documentary by the sum of its parts—form, artistry, historical accuracy, objectiveness. By the metaphysical approach to the interpretation, it is often the case that a critic/viewer will regard a picture in relation to his schema of the human life cycle or in relation to suppositions of humankind's actual orientation in the observable and theoretical Universe/s. From this unique point-of-view, the critic is encouraged to deconstruct a documentary on the basis of its inherent struggle against myopia, rather than merely on the basis of formal merits. In this way, ideally speaking, a system of checks and balances among filmmakers and his market may be established that ensures the humility of the filmmaker and the objectivity of his documentary. More specifically, a documentary, by this method, operates under a system of mutual consent. The filmmaker, in whom the critic invests his trust, consents to execute a documentary that in no way subverts the subject matter or wrongly leads the audience, and the critic becomes responsible for a just and constructive criticism of the filmmaker and his film.

Such a system might operate in an ideal world. Unfortunately, where there are cameras there are crises. By its nature, the camera subverts its subject matter and the reality that it seeks to record, even as this subversion, which is a natural effect of the filmmaking process, is largely unavoidable. That is, except in cases where the camera is alone in an airtight and dark place, removed entirely from stimuli with which the rolling film can be exposed. Only then does a film/documentary cease to subvert reality, creating only anti-subject matter. Presumably, the ambition of the filmmaker is to evince in his films a semblance of reality, which is both the essence of recorded images that seek to simulate reality, and the responsibility of a documentary that claims to possess even a nominal authority of the subject matter. That a documentary can presume to fully understand its subject matter is debatable. Alas, we can only refer to degrees of authority.

To assert authority over a subject presupposes a sense of responsibility. If this is a far cry from the actual, it shouldn't be. In the case of the documentary, the filmmaker chooses his subject matter in good faith that it won't inadvertently rebel against his presence or camera. He must ingratiate himself with the subjects/social actors, in an attempt at winning their confidence. The degree to which the filmmaker has familiarized himself with the subjects will be reflected onto the recorded image. That the

filmmaker's familiarity and expertise can be detected determines the quality of the finished product and its overall relevance—social, cultural, political.

This illustrates the above-mentioned system of checks and balances, but to the exclusion of other, very poignant issues, including the effect of the camera presence. Will the camera be regarded as a positive motivational force, or as outright effrontery, a type of covert colonialism, causing character and psychological complexes among the subjects? Have the camera, crew, and accompanying technology, in cultures that are unaccustomed to such, a real and measurable effect that is adverse? The camera and the documentaries in the service of which they are used can be forces of ill, in so far as they risk emphasizing a mythical sense of the 'other'—us and them (i.e., George Irwin's *Meat*, 283-284). Ethnographic documentaries, social documentaries, institutional and political documentaries, all have the spooky capacity to represent the human as a specimen. This is a real crisis.

Documentaries are respected when they function humanely and do not manipulate the subject matter or their audience. The level to which these two points are concealed also determines the respect a documentary will achieve. That a camera can appear humane after post-production, even if it was used in an aggressive or assaulting manner, is an example of the manipulative nature of the process of filmmaking. Unquestionably, the camera is passive, unmotivated, wholly without intentions of its own. It is the filmmaker that must wrestle with ethical questions and that controls the camera—aiming it, pointing it, focusing it on his target. If the filmmaker has nihilistic persuasions, worships pure objectivity, or does not believe that our world is a moral one, then the ethical problems/dilemmas that he encounters in filmmaking will be few. Appearances, skin, stones, customs, culture, sexuality, are theirs for the filming. It is reality as they see it, true or not. Questions of factuality, adherence to historical accuracy, sensitivity to the inherent subjectivity of being, all may be disregarded as fluff, while raw reactions, man as exhibit, culture as living artifact, nature as grotesquerie, all become cannon fodder.

It is not enough to watch and record and be content with the outcome. The novelty of human experience becomes redundant in the camera's eye. As it ceases to be novel, and as the exotic enters into the realm of the everyday, life on Earth, once a

privilege—anomalous and wonderful—becomes regarded as intolerably ordinary. I shouldn't think that boredom was an issue until the advent of the moving picture. The moving picture, what with the inundation of images, reinforced what was slowly being considered the commonality of human experience. But if there is one thing that the human experience is not, it is common. This is not to suggest that the documentary is without its saving graces. Rather it is to suggest that its vices far outnumber those graces.

Vices in documentary film have developed over time, innocently at first, and as they began to work in the favor of the production, shamelessly. By vices I refer more to the absence, partial and total, of key qualities, than to inclusions. Documentary film has been compared to literature, but in no way are the two crafts equivalent. Unlike literature, the documentary cannot be pared down, stripped of interfering adjectives, simplified to a degree that will appeal to a general readership. In documentary film, too much is at stake. The more facts that are extracted from a documentary, the more context that is edited out, the more inferences and leaps of faith the critic and audience are forced to make. In a Hollywood film, inference can work in the movie's favor, resulting in interpretations that fuel sensationalism, imparting to the movie an aura, and thus elevating it. A documentary must supply those facts that will satiate an audience's desire for truth, and treat the subjective facets of the material in such a way that does not alienate the same audience. The documentary, unlike the Hollywood film, cannot lie. Herein lays the responsibility of the filmmaker that underscores the validity of documentary film. Even a walk in the park cannot *only* be a walk in the park—not in documentary film. It is the obligation of the filmmaker to reveal to the viewer what park, what time, and why. Whether or not the viewer then believes the documentarian depends upon the level of excellence with which the overall documentary is composed. That is, with a minimum of foley work, editing, sound choreography, all of which act as barriers between the audience and the actuality, even as they may contribute to a heightening of the viewer's senses. This said heightening, especially in documentary film, is not conducive to the relaying of reality as the filmmaker originally envisaged it. Such devices belong to the fiction film and have no place in a documentary. They may contribute to a documentary's appeal, turning something droll into

something sexy, but not without first undermining reality as the camera sees it.

Of course, reality as the camera sees it, is not reality as the filmmaker sees it, or as the audience and critics will see it. Documentaries possess qualities that may sooner be likened to memories than to images as registered when they strike the retina. Our vision is peripheral, constantly self-referential, and in living color. The camera cannot and will not ever see in this way. One day, if cameras possess artificial intelligence, it will be just that, artificial intelligence. This is why a documentary must never be mistaken for a representation of an actuality. The filmmaker is severely limited by his humanness, by his tendency to manipulate facts in deference to style and form. The camera is limited by design: it has no nerves and no conscience.

All these factors must be carefully weighed by the filmmaker and by the audience. The documentary must not presume to have captured reality as it was, and the audience must not presume that it can be. The filmmaker brings his value system, beliefs, culture, and sex to the set, reservation, city, or landscape, and all of these aspects of his being will influence his perception of the subject matter. Likewise, to the theater, the viewer will bring his value system, religious beliefs, cultural artifacts, and sex, and all of these will impact his reception of the images. If the documentary is presented in such a way that it frankly acknowledges the viewer, the viewer's limitations, as well as the documentary's limitations, then it cannot be condemned as barefaced and impudent. Honesty must be the overarching cause of documentary film.

The documentary, still, is a relatively young discipline, one that is barely a century old. Perhaps we expect more from documentary than it is capable of outwardly exhibiting at the present time. As all things, it is 'in-process,' and undergoing changes that affect the degree of its reflexivity, candidness, and relevance. It remains somewhat crude in its regard of the human—human as specimen—and although this is by no means always the case, it is often the case. As a result, the hazards the documentary filmmaker may encounter are many. These include cultural effrontery, social effrontery, political effrontery, and religious effrontery. The conscientious documentary is by virtue of the form, a limited documentary, in so far as it acknowledges two things: illusions and impropriety. The documentary cannot presume to understand more

than it does. It cannot know the subjects better than they know themselves. Presumption of this kind is unwarranted. Like the novelist, the documentarian should tackle those subjects that he knows. The topics, then, will be those in which the documentarian has a special knowledge, rather than a cursory one. In other words, the filmmaker will be operating under as few illusions as possible, disseminating little or no misinformation. The viewer must not take it for granted that the filmmaker is an expert in his field, but must know that he does not merely rest on his laurels.

Lastly, the audience, again, possesses as much responsibility as the filmmaker. After all, it is they, hopefully, for whom the documentary was intended, and it is they whose responsibility it is to respond, critically and intelligently to the documentary. It is the general response that will determine whether or not the documentary bears cultural relevance and significance. Was the documentary but one more example of the boldness, audacity, and effrontery of which filmmakers are capable, or was it an example of the conscientiousness, frankness, and sensitivity that are the hallmarks of great documentaries?

× **011802MD:** *THE FUTURE*

AESTHETICS, TRANSCULTURALISM AND FILM, OR: HOW I DEVELOPED AN OVERNIGHT OBSESSION WITH FILM-AESTHETICS AND LEARNED TO COPE WITH THE IDEA THAT I MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO EFFECTIVELY COPE WITH THE UNTIMELY DEATH OF ALLAYNE ASHBY

Aesthetics, by which we mean the formative principles in matters of artistic beauty, impart to film a physical textuality without which a moving picture cannot properly operate. Film, in which aesthetic principles are used sparingly, or not at all, must resort to expedience, which is more often than not, ruinous to a picture. Aesthetics, however, is not an end in itself; alone, it is meaningless.

In order to be occupied by a fullness of meaning, the aesthetic aspects of a film, irrespective of artistic merits, must be founded firstly within a social and cultural context. Aesthetics do not comprise a discipline that is independently all of a piece. Contrarily, aesthetics are but one of many crucial aspects which contribute to the making of a film and in concordance with which must operate

as a singular discipline among a multiplicity of disciplines. Counted among these disciplines are psychology, sociology, chemistry and technology, production, textuality and culture.

How, then, and on what level, can an interaction between these seemingly unrelated forces occur? I contend that it is at the level of the audience that the aesthetic aspects and the socio-cultural aspects of film are united. Only a receptive audience, actively engaged in the act of perception, can translate the coded ambiguities inherent in film into a coherent and meaningful whole. The audience is, essentially, formed from a mass society in a world largely determined by capitalism and industrialism, urbanization and centralization; it goes without saying that the audience (informed by the aforementioned), will to varying degrees, analyze a film accordingly. In spectatorship, the aesthetic and socio-cultural dimensions are reconciled.

On the other hand, film studies should not be determined by the assumption that a film can be described by a dissection of its parts and its popular rapport with an audience. It remains that there are elements of the moving picture which are consistently aloof from rhetoric and speculation; elements that elude scrutiny and dissection—the implements of critical analysis.

So, it would appear that some film forms seek to exploit these so-called 'modes of fascination' in an effort to confound the traditional aesthetic and socio-political devices campaigned by Classical Cinema. Such approaches to filmmaking have the capacity to universalize a medium that has hitherto been developed with the interests of a homogenous audience in mind, an audience sharing attributes inherited from an affluent society.



× **011899MD**

“The guilty man is the most pliant. Give him a gift and he will be a willing hostage.”

—George Irwin

“If you aspire to be a good person, you might as well quit. A good person isn’t something you become, it’s what you are. Anyway, there is more satisfaction in being a jerk.”

—David Duff

⁹ ∫ - **SŌWILŌ**, “SUN.” THE SUN IS EVER A JOY IN THE HOPES OF SEAFARERS WHEN THEY JOURNEY AWAY OVER THE FISHES’ BATH, UNTIL THE COURSER OF THE DEEP BEARS THEM TO LAND. —OLD ENGLISH POEM

DAVID DUFF CONFESSES

You would not be wrong were you to call me crooked. *I am*. You would not be wrong were you to call me a liar, a cheat. *I am both*. You would not be entirely wrong were you to call me insensitive. I can be.

I cannot answer for some of my crimes. I say that I love when I don't. It would seem that I have few loyalties—to people, places, and things. I am unfeeling, an actor. I do not respond to individuals as I once did. I am tired of them. They bore me. I bore myself. I will sit here until leaves replace the cherry blossoms.

I talk with her—with Katharine—and am intimate with her, yet I give nothing. She does not know where I have walked, how many miles. I can forgive her that. She hasn't been to the cemeteries, the battlefields, the little, hopeless enclaves. I must forgive her that. She does not acknowledge my limitations.

To what will I be going home? To all that remains, I say—to all that remains. I will go back. I always go back—to Glasgow. When life has grudgingly borne all of the honest lovers and let them go and when in my sleep clang the bells of Paisley Abbey, I'll know that I am finished, know that I have read and have walked and have loved. I will remember that I adored a girl once and would redeem the boy for the dullard I have become. I was not happy, but I was in love with life. I was a sinner. I dared to love. When I am gone, remember me in your prayers to Katharine, to Allayne, to Aubrey Whistler and George Irwin; to Valeria, Brian Jr. and Bethany, bless their little souls. We cannot compare the things we remember to the things that we forget. They are equals under the Sun. Pity him who forgets nothing and pretends to remember little, for he is the saddest among us. His burden is the worst.

I, who have loved, have hated, too. I, who claimed a passion for my fellows, lied. I, who have been scolded, have scolded, too. I have hurt as many as I have helped. I beg they curse my name. I am *eyes*—I was given them when I was young. They were not, and are not, my own. We do not have the control we think we have—the dominion—over ourselves, over our destiny. This is a half-world sewn with half-truths. We are incomplete. We are born with broken hearts. Heaviest is the heart that prefigures the soul...

× **012399MD**

THE MILL ON BRIDGEVIEW

The sun sets.
 The ducks have come.
 Still waters grow stiller.
 We are five,
 At a table with a mustard-colored cloth.
 Brian Todd Huggins Sr. with a Gin 'n Tonic,
 Mother and Grandma Payton-Ferguson with wine,
 Katharine a Pepsi, and I with water.
 A crock of orange cheese, brittle crackers—
 Round, rectangular, ovular,
 Some with seeds, some without.

× **012599MD**

PATERNAL GRANDMOTHER'S TWO-MINUTE LUCIDITY

“I have an idea, but that is it. An idea. I tell myself I’ll look for her. I never do. She has a book of your father’s. It was his last book, unpublished. No one knew that he had written it. It was his best and he wouldn’t publish it. I don’t know why.”

“What was it about?”

“Hitlerism, of course, and the ocean. He loved the ocean. It was a mad book—his maddest, with his own illustrations. He was always drawing, God only knows what. He was never without a pad and pens. On the boat, your father drew drawing after drawing of your mother and Katharine—Katharine in linen dresses, or in her printed skirts and bikini tops.”

× **013099MD**

I walked the long, slender trail at Rock Creek,
 Wended my way through spring trails,
 Slept on a wall.
 I cried for the leopards at Woodley Park.
 Bridges, buildings and buses dwarfed me.
 I drank, quit, woke in a desert—

I was a regular at the Dubliner,
A face at India Gate;
I was a ghost at Union Station—
a passenger, a customer.
I was a stomach in Georgetown.

× **020199MD**

Dear Russell,

When I wake up and look over the foot of my bed, out the window, all I can see is Edinburgh Harbor. When I sit up, more Harbor, but also spires and building-tops. Putting on my robe by the window, I can see the ground, the seagulls on the lampposts. I'd almost rather stay in bed. In bed I could be anywhere.

I don't like being on the water's edge. I don't like to see the horizon. It seems finite—limited. I like to think that oceans are endless; that they don't bump up against islands and nations; that they don't pass under bridges and lap against jagged rocks.

Love,

Katharine

× **020299MD**

"The information manager must work assiduously to synthesize a truth. Then, in order to flourish, that truth must come under intense and prolonged persecution. The illusion of a synthetic truth's inviolability is all-important."

—George Irwin

I sit by an open window in the kitchen of Button House. Outside, the grass is brown and the trees are dead, leafless, but there is a

warm breeze that buffets the curtains. Irwin has asked me to develop a cryptogram. He said I had latitude; it would be slipped into Britannica Online.¹⁰ I chose Sinclair Lewis. I was fond of the life he led. He made few compromises. He was consumed by a singular passion and was determined to realize his creative vision. He wrote about what he knew. Vanity, perhaps, was his tragic flaw. He responded to his critics with unrivaled ferocity.

As I sat ruminating, chewing on a pencil, Esteban rolled into the yard on his motorcycle. He had rallied and put on weight.

“Get dressed. You’re wasting your time,” he said. “Let’s go for a ride!”

× 020399MD

“We experience at least two deaths during the course of our lives. Both deaths have noticeable and lasting effects on the body. The first death increases the rate at which the second death begins. The first death—a waking death—is more traumatic than the second death, which often involves physical pain. The first death is a memorable one, while the second is final and superlative. The first death, which directly affects the character of memory, influences the shape that our lives assume. The waking death is a spiritual death. Sometimes the spiritual death happens in our sleep, and we do not notice until it is too late. The child is

¹⁰ THE CONFLATION OF MISINFORMATION WITH DISINFORMATION HAS RESULTED IN ERRONEOUS THINKING, ASSIGNING LIKE VALUES TO TWO UNLIKE TERMS. MISINFORMATION SEEKS TO MISINFORM ITS INTENDED AUDIENCE — IT’S CONTENT IS INHERENTLY UNTRUE. DISINFORMATION, ON THE OTHER HAND, ALWAYS POSSESSES A KERNEL OF TRUTH, BUT IS PACKAGED IN SUCH A WAY THAT IT MAY EASILY BE DISCOUNTED IN THE EVENT THAT IT COMES UNDER MEANINGFUL SCRUTINY. DISINFORMATION IS MANAGED FACT. IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF DISINFORMATION’S AUDIENCE TO DECOCT FACT FROM FICTION. IN PRACTICE, IT IS RARE THAT THE FACTS SURVIVE THE FICCTIONS WITH WHICH THEY ARE BUNDLED. THIS IS DISINFORMATION’S OVERARCHING STRATEGY.

WHILST MISINFORMATION IS SKILL-LESS, DISINFORMATION REQUIRES EXPERTISE, OR DRAWS UPON SANCTIONED TRUSTS WITH EXPERTISE. HARD DATA IS SUBSEQUENTLY SHIELDED, OR INOCULATED FROM WIDESPREAD PROPAGATION, BY ENSURING THAT IT IS ENCAPSULATED IN A CONCOCTED, UNTENABLE CONTEXT. THIS IS THE MEANS BY WHICH DISCLOSURE MAY BE ACHIEVED, THEN DISCREDITED. FACTS BECOME SPORT: EASY TO RIDICULE, SIMPLE TO HATE. NOT ONLY DOES THE DISINFORMANT TELL THE TRUTH, BUT HE ALSO ENGINEERS A CLIMATE THAT GUARANTEES HE MAY CONTINUE TO WORK IN HIS CHOSEN FIELD WITHOUT FURTHER INTERRUPTION.

SOME DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGNS ARE BETTER THAN OTHERS. THE BEST CAMPAIGNS AIM TO EXASPERATE AND EXHAUST THEIR AUDIENCE: *ATTRITION IS THE KEY TO MAINTAINING SECRECY.*

more keenly aware of her spiritual death than the adult. Why is this so? I propose that it is an issue of sensitivity. The child that has not been perverted too soon by language and by structure will persevere.”

—Andrew Lindsay Stirling

Even I sometimes miss the ceremony that attends death.
 The winter flowers,
 The light from without that fills a church.
 Funeral processions
 Over baked earth,
 Over frozen earth,
 On narrow roads and broad roads...

I strode down the aisle. In a pew below a stained-glass window depicting the Pieta sat my mother, crying with a tissue to her nose; nearer to the casket sat Katharine, her head twitching.

× **020499MD**

“Of all the joys, the greatest joy is to nix love and to nix it with enthusiasm.”

—David Duff

ESTEBAN, FORLORN

“I knelt before her and held her hands, prepared to propose.”

Valeria said, “When I told you I loved you I meant it, but at the park, I told you only to hurt you.”

“At the party, she flirted with other men. On a napkin, during her speech, I wrote down the things she had said. At the park, she stood fluttering her wings. I could see her heart beat through her dress. Now, drunk, her arms around another man, she looked a perfect stranger. But I lie to myself.”

× 020599MD

Dear Messrs. Duff and Irwin,

After careful consideration of the evidence at hand, which is ample, thanks to details submitted by A. Whistler and Associates and documents issued by the offices of G. Irwin, it is clear, beyond any reasonable doubt, that a bout of the highest order is both necessary and advisable. The Evidentiary Hearing Committee have reviewed the evidence under consideration (which they refer to as 'incontrovertible') and are of the steadfast opinion that any actions decided upon by the parties of interest would be prudent and wise, granted that any such actions be committed on an occasion of uncommon excess and improbable proportions and which must in no way be bridled by the usual cautions exercised under such circumstances. That being said, spokespersons for the offices of Russell Huggins beg that all parties of interest capitulate at once and agree upon a date and time for an occasion of great immoderacy, that all parties may join in holy prodigality. Amen.

Yours truly,

Esteban & Button, Partners at Law

× 020699MD

THE COUNTERFEITERS

Duff concludes that the poet imitates nature better than the sculptor, because the work is not at the mercy of matter. Although Duff employs a high degree of sophistry in this argument, it is based upon the Neo-Platonic idea expressed in the notion that the form of the poem is present in the imagination and only awaits its release at the hands of the author.

Thus, the last argument, in support of poetry, is the most effective of all. It suggests that poetry has the ability to reveal the Platonic world of forms by means of the elements Beauty and Pleasure. However, if the final test of the work is in the reader, then poetry triumphs, because according to Duff, "sensual men derive more beauty and greater pleasure from poetry than do intelligent men (*uomini intellettivi*), i.e., men of non-sensual disposition."

The conclusions, which assert poetry's superiority, are only negated by the resolution of the debate. Duff's equalization of the two arts, sculpture and poetry, in his philosophical conclusion was the most significant statement made in his landmark treatise, *Apotheosis*.

Poetry, Duff acknowledges, can counterfeit handily all expressions of the world that may be sensed directly as well as indirectly: thunder, lightning and fire; air, smoke and breezes. Here, sculpture fails, but insofar as sculpture enlists matter and appeals to the sense of touch, it can achieve a lifelikeness that escapes the poet, in spite of verbal felicity. Moreover, touch is less fallible than vision. Where the poet is accustomed to deception and artifice, the sculptor has no such luxuries. The sculptor is the more truthful.

× 020799MD

Dear George,

Cipher: Philadelphia

I received your Duff-inspired memo of 020199, which duly, if circuitously, reached me. I will make such a reply, as I am able. I believe that prose is considered excellent to the degree that it approximates the effect of a relief—the illusion of dimension.

I used to consider that poetry was the lantern of prose and that between the two there was the same difference as between Orchard Park and Plum Creek. But now that I have considered your memo, in which you argue that things which seek a similar effect are in and of themselves alike, I have revised my opinion. I now concede that prose and poetry are one and the same, as they proceed from the same faculty: *Imagination*.

-Russell

× 020999MD

AUBREY WHISTLER ELUCIDATED: *THE MAKING OF A FOX HOLLOW GIRL*¹¹

Mayhem for a father: whipped into frenzy by booze and unhappiness, he'd visit regular, thorough beatings on Aubrey, gagging her with a dirty sock, tying her hands with rough rope—locking her in a cramped closet. And there she'd stay until poppa sobered and went foraging for his shoes. “*What!* However did you get in here, child? What game is this?” And the child Aubrey would be dragged into the living room, unbound, the sock withdrawn. “This is no game for a child,” he'd say, arms folded, face grim, eyes squinting. “I'm off. Clean yourself up and get some food in you.” And Mayhem would steal out the door, pulling his overcoat from the peg on the wall as an afterthought. Dear Mayhem.

The house would stink of his escapades; stink of sour aftershave, moldering clothes, wood soaked with spilled scotch. A pile of half-burned draperies smoldered on the kitchen floor, an old telephone book, reduced to ashes, the spine still intact, lay lumped in a corner. Dishes, some shattered, filled the sink. A cold gust threaded through new spider web cracks in the dining room windows; and from the chandelier above hung several of mother's bras. Dear Ma.

Aubrey wandered into the living room, stood swaying by the mantle, feet crunching on picture glass. In the hearth, spared remarkably from the pogrom, a picture of her mother, little Aubrey in her arms, a turquoise bib tied around her neck, a toothless smile on her face. Mother had a bandana wrapped around her bald head. A long, wide shadow was cast over their bodies and onto the wall—Mayhem. Dear Mayhem. The Kodak camera in his ruddy hands, pants pocket bulging with flash-bulbs, a stupid, crooked-toothed grin on his face, his hair in constant disarray, eyebrows teased into a wild ruin, cheeks rosy. “One more, Gail—tickle her so she giggles. Tickle her. That's it. And blow in her ear. Shit! Need a new bulb. Wait! Wait, one more!” And this was his Sunday ritual. In the hearth were hundreds of yellowing photographs. Ma on her wedding day, a high sheen in her eyes, her golden hair thick and

¹¹ REFER TO *THE BEEKEEPER, A NOVELLA*, p. 140

unruly, the wind picking at it; Ma, pregnant; Ma and pop, still young, passing wee Aubrey in the air. Pictures of Ma, thinner, eyes set in deep sockets, the bright, wide smile still intact and pictures of little Aubrey with Mayhem's finger in the lens; pictures of little Aubrey with searching eyes in too-big chairs, legs dangling, Mayhem pressing her into the cushions by her shoulder, pointing the camera in her face, the shutter clacking open, and then snapping shut, the flash bulbs exploding, searing her eyes.

Then the long, lonesome afternoons, Mayhem in the darkroom, splashing away in the developer, the cigarette butts floating in the gloom as his blurry photographs came to life, some hung up to dry, swinging by clothespins, others left to rot in their chemical stew; and the sound of bottles breaking against the walls. And now, here in the hearth, some of those ill-born photographs with cigarette burns and bubbled emulsions. "I'm going to capture you," he'd say. "Trap you, see? Then you can't get away. You can't die this way. I'll freeze you. Sit still so Mayhem can get a clean shot." And he'd fire away, picture after picture. And I suppose that's why he locked her in the closet—to keep her from leaving him. But as she stared into the hearth, broken glass crackling under her feet, Aubrey knew he was gone for good. And so it was. Dear Mayhem was struck by a bus on his way to work. It was *he* that left, after all, not she.

So began an unusual chapter in Aubrey's life. An only child with few friends and no extended family, she became a ward of Fox Hollow School for Girls, a facility for the wayward and parentless. But to say that Fox Hollow was an improvement would be an exaggeration. Fox Hollow was a frightful monstrosity, seemingly carved out of a solid piece of granite, with long, mullioned windows punched into walls; windows too narrow for egress. Ivy colonized the facades, reaching up and over the eaves, sending roots into the slate roof, causing fractures and fissures into which rain seeped, soaking the dormitory's plaster ceiling. Aubrey lay awake at night and listened to water drip and collect in the shallow stills formed by the uneven tile floor. She'd turn on her side, watch the moon nestled in the clouds skid by the windows, imagine Mayhem in a soft nest somewhere curled up with Ma with bunches of hair flowing over her shoulders, tickling Mayhem's nose. She understood Mayhem's anger and the madness that began to attach itself to his brain like barnacles. She knew she was a casualty of circumstance; that maybe Mayhem had always been mad and that

his wife brought him back down to earth for a short spell, nurtured him, and breathed confidence into his lungs. But without Gail he was a nowhere-man once again—the mad theoretician of his youth, scrawling figures into the air, drinking famously, sleeping only after concussions. And then there was the mystery that was his daughter, Gail's daughter, the little waif with perfect teeth, her mother's button nose and aquiline jaw. But his eyes, there in her little sockets, like cat's eye marbles set in chilled ivory; not judging eyes, either, but worse: *accepting eyes*. And that she still loved him in spite of his throes and abuse—adored him even—was intolerable. But the wisdom that might have been another man's reward for suffering was not to be his. Wisdom did not come knocking, only anger. So he would avenge the death of his young wife and wage a full-on assault against fate, using his Aubrey as a proxy. How much pain could she tolerate, what whimpers could he extract, distill and bottle? And failing whimpers, he would capture the terror in her eyes in photographs. But in spite of the exploding filaments, her eyes would emerge kind, soft and forgiving and a red rage would fill him; with the butt of his cigarette he'd replace the eyes with smoking holes. He'd throw a whiskey bottle at the safelight, extinguishing it in an electric sizzle, then lie down in the chemical dark to scratch away at the cement floor with his fingernails, wearing them down to the quick.

× **021299MD**

Smaller than the shape of thought,
 Softer than the sound of the smallest whisper,
 My wish, Allayne,
 That I as fish by the ocean...
 be by you embraced.

× **022799MD**

"It isn't a sense to which I have lost access, but nonsense from which I have been liberated."

—Russell Huggins

Dear George,

It is the next-to-last day of the second month of the year 1999. Orchard Park was fully alive, wall-to-wall with pale ghosts. The weather was mild. In Nigel Square, wraiths flopped in anemic patches of sunlight, peeled off their raggedy jackets.

I took in the Strand exhibit at Eggleston Manor. It was everything that I hoped it would be and more. InK from Iron Gate delivered a private lecture at 4:00 PM to which I couldn't gain admittance.

I am becoming increasingly near-sighted -- squinting and photosensitive. In spite of the weather, I am wary of Orchard Park. The soul has a breaking-point after which it doesn't accept further afflictions. I experienced one such affliction, as by spiritual stress-fracture, yesterday. I could not keep from crying. I implicate the accelerating rate at which my hearing fails. I cannot seem to hear anything but my own heartbeat. Yesterday I was struck by the cerebration that it must be as it was for xxxxxx who, once fully accustomed to the world of sound, suddenly was shut of it, ignored, more or less. Still, he remained possessed by the tickling tendrils of passion which ignited and set ablaze a live, burning course through his hands. It all ended with a knot in his heart. None but the deaf who've once heard can fully understand the madness that accompanies the disorder of imperfect hearing, and the interior noise, louder, which replaces voices, ambient sounds, and thunder. As they who are afflicted by the loss of sight -- who are haunted by those apparitions permitted access to the subconscious by memory, which is no guard at all -- so too do the deaf learn of the world of the grotesque. He, who would attempt to reconcile the quiet world with the world of sound, invites sorrow; music is the nightmare of the deaf.

-Russell

× **022899MD**

Drizzle courses over haggard bark,
 Patters on waxen leaves,
 Drips onto a ruined wall.
 The Sun won't be commanded,
 Even as the thunder cracks: *THRACK!*
 And again: *THRACK!*
 It punctures the treetops,
 Like the nosecone of a diving jet,
 Through the thin membrane of a tympanum.
 It roams the forest floor,
 In blotches;
 It has an audience with twitching ferns,
 Lances a ladder leaning into an apple tree;
 It dapples the man on the top-most rung.
 Raindrops patter on the bill of the man's cap.
 In the chaos of mossy crotches, broken limbs,
 Remote become the laws that govern the fiddlehead,
 The creeping lichen and the rotting leaf.

× **030199MD .01**

We are dumb
 And growing dumber,
 As we become increasingly clever;
 We celebrate cleverness.
 That is our new 'shallow end.'
 We were good little ears of corn,
 Until harvest-time.
 Then we rebelled,
 Lest we be shucked, eaten and digested,
 Excreted—
 And none the wiser for it.

—Carrie Shields Buchanan

× **030199MD .02**

It is never too late to begin a truthful account of one's actions. It is my intention to delineate what may be described as symptoms of a conscious life -- symptoms peculiar to one R. Huggins. It is my hope, when all is said and done, to discover that I painted a candid and accurate portrait of a thoroughly crooked man. I think that whether or not I have done this life objective justice will be readily apparent to the casual reader. Anything less and I will have failed. Here is the truth, as I see it. First, the small matter of cryptography (my sincere apologies, Irwin):

GENEVA, SWITZERLAND - *LES PÂQUIS, 1988*

"A tell-tale sign of the cryptogram is suspicious repetition and a didactic tone," Irwin instructed. "And I will share this with you *once*: the cryptogram written by the sober man is inferior to the cryptogram written by the drunken one."

LESSON THE FIRST: THE GIRL-CHILD

"Marry me," she said.
I did not hesitate. I said I would.
"Your step-father, the judge, he will marry us."
We laughed but shouldn't have.

Her brother's stroller,
It was obvious,
She didn't like-
The idea of it.
She was loath to think of motherhood,
And thank God:
She was but a girl-child of seventeen.
But I was wild about her;
About her long hair,
Her hard parts and her soft parts.
She, like other girl-children,
Was wont to think in symbols,
And she, protective like a carrying cat,
Would be my wife one day.

Strolling at night
 With a baseball bat
 And her father's newborn;
 Strolling at night,
 Unmarried in a yellow jacket,
 She was beautiful.

Standing now,
 Beside her father's son,
 We said casual things.
 The passing cars slowed to watch,
 The flowers drew near.

Listening:
 The air was still as death.
 I wondered if her world was as quiet as mine;
 Wondered if she noticed the hush-
 The hush that had fallen-
 Walking,
 Briskly with her father's son-her father's newborn;
 Walking together on an uneven slate walk-
 With a baseball bat,
 She regarded me warmly, over her shoulder.
 She told me to "Look at the trees, how big they are."
 I did. They were.
 "Twilight makes me sick," she said.
 The Sun set.
 In the stroller, the newborn slept.
 In the new-dark leapt her hands like night-birds,
 After bugs after hands, *my* hands, my heart.
 We drew too near, too soon,
 Her broken home on Avenue de Vertou.

"So, Russell, according to the cryptogram, in what apartment does the girl-child live?"

I thought about it, did the numbers: "1520."

Irwin patted me on the back, said, "See, it's not so hard after all."

× **030299MD***“There is nothing so balletic as random acts of violence.”*

—Russell Huggins

“What is the primary objective of a nation-state? To create and preserve a myth. It really is that simple.”

—James A. Trainer

THE ORCHARD PARK REVOLT OF 1998

They wrote when they didn't have to write, took up pens when it brought them no public glory, wrote in order to put a lie to the cynicism that kept the lowlands in darkness. They defended a Republic of the Imagination that was a belief in the full potential of derangement. They won't go away.

No other conflict of the 20th century has combined the histrionics, random violence, and the ethical muddiness of the struggle between despotism and imagination. The Nigel Square Conflict was the first and last major phase—the opening and closing battle, in effect—of the Greater Orchard Park Revolt. For these reasons, the struggle had immense ideological importance. The revolt attracted an astounding three volunteers from two neighborhoods who rallied to the defense of Orchard Park and joined an inter-neighborhood brigade in selfless dedication to a suspect cause.

Months earlier, Orchard Park held quasi-democratic elections that installed a new, despotic coalition government, consisting chiefly of cats and dogs. The opposition party, led by perennial mayoral candidate James Trainer, plotted a coup, and in July 1998 their allies among the reactionary human element attempted to seize control of the East End of Orchard Park. The cats and dogs rose up and the revolt was met with formidable resistance.

Nevertheless, popular East End dictators—Esteban Suárez (Button House), and Russell Huggins (Button House)—offered to assist the rebel's imperiled cause. In the unbelievable heat of July 1998, the movement hereinafter referred to as The Button House Inter-Neighborhood Brigade for the Glorification of Orchard Park—BHINGO—dispatched a contingent to Nigel Square, where

they handily beat back the advancing hordes of cats and dogs. The coalition government, badly demoralized, disbanded. A permanent ambassadorship to the Nigel Park Diner, the new administrative and legislative center of Orchard Park, was revealed and James Trainer was appointment to the position for life:

“You came to us from the backwaters of Baltimore County, representing Cuban-Americans and a couple of Whites. You came like brothers of ours, like sons of undying Orchard Park. In the hardest days of the revolt, the struggle, the movement, when Nigel Square, the administrative seat of Orchard Park was threatened by rabid cats and dogs, it was you, gallant comrades of the Button House Inter-Neighborhood Brigade for the Glorification of Orchard Park, who helped to save the Square and more importantly, the Diner, with your fighting spirit. You can go proudly. You are history. You are legend, you heroic examples of Orchard Park’s insularity and intolerance.”

—James Trainer, Ambassador for Life to the Nigel Park Diner

× **030399MD**

SAVING BUTTON HOUSE

Dear xxxxxx,

As I recall, xxxxxx manages several slums in the East End. She is impeccably responsible with a very pleasant disposition, with a dexterous mind and excellence with numbers. Her managerial skills are proven. Her husband is a kind and self-effacing man with many practical skills that have enabled him to amass a striking fortune free from the erosion of taxation.

That being said, I am familiar with xxxxxx's approach to business in an intelligence-gathering capacity, but am ignorant of her qualities as a property owner and manager, which is to say, I cannot be certain that the preservation of Button House counts among her objectives.

It is difficult for me to imagine anything of a dire nature happening to the property beyond the indignities already served up by nature and degenerate tenancy. I have enjoyed a long and uninterrupted romance with the property, so naturally I am wary of the idea that it might be altered in a disturbing or even irreversible way. In light of

my personal attachments to the property, I would perceive commercialization as positively heartbreaking.

My own sentiments aside, xxxxxx's attention to detail and quality have always been appreciable and it is probable that she would pay Button House similar attention.

Sincerely yours,

Russell Huggins, 2nd Floor Tenant, Caretaker, Advocate

× **040399MD**

“That we stopped writing letters is a tragedy. You can’t reread a gunshot wound.”

—Russell Huggins

× **040599MD**

HECTARES

He was in love, desperately in love. His hands shook, his heart beat as quickly as a bird’s, and in his mind nothing was straight. His movements were jerky, uncoordinated—he could barely steer. The furrows were crooked. Over the tractor engine he could hear his heart beat—each beat was a hammer blow. *Cupid*, he thought to himself, *was a blacksmith, who hammered his target’s heart over an anvil, shaping it to the dimensions of his will.*

He was losing the feeling in his knees, and just as his toes began to tingle, and the gooseflesh to dot his bare arms, the Sun’s bald head began to show through the treetops, and bloody streaks crisscrossed the sky. They fragmented it, rented it, shattered it into a thousand malformed shards that fell to the earth, refracting sunlight, etching shadows into the muddy fields. The tractor rose and fell and bucked, the plow bumping behind across the hard-packed earth, barely thawed. He leaned back in the hard seat and eased into a higher gear. The engine responded with a groan, and as the tractor slowed he could clearly see the individual treads of the tires—the meaty treads of the fat rear wheels, and the narrow parallel treads of the front ones. He nudged the steering wheel and

watched the open steering column rotate, turning the bowed wheels slightly, causing them to dig deeper into the dirt.

The bald head of the Sun had risen slightly, lightening the sky, dimming the falling shards, quickening the shadows that leapt across the field, stretching and retracting, shuttling over the furrows with wills of their own. He came to a gentle rise and shifted into a low gear. The tractor groaned and began the ascent. At the foot of the rise he passed into a shadow that had settled into the cleft of the hill. Here, where the earth still slept and steamed, untouched by the embers of morning, a chill passed through him, gooseflesh prickling. A longing swept through him, first in waves, then in timed ripples that traveled the length of his body. The hair on the nape of his neck began to prickle, and sweat to stand out on his forehead. As the tractor achieved the rise and began to round the hilltop, its nose reached out of the shadow and into an auburn screen suffused with pink and yellow stripes. The tractor leveled off, the engine block disappeared in the glare and as he was drawn up and out of the shadow, the light engulfed him, too. Out of the screen of light developed the fields, but now with a blue, monochromatic tint.

He was in love, desperately in love. The sun was arisen and the once river-deep furrows had grown shallow; the sun that once shown through the bony wood and scrub fields like an x-ray, now shown down on them. The woods were developing a purple cast, and the fields an orange one, as the buds grew larger, ready to outsize their seams. On the horizon, where a picket line of trees marched arm in arm, a pointed steeple gouged the air, and atop it a metal cross, like a little daystar. Because the church was nestled just below the horizon, only the steeple was visible. As the tractor did an obtuse turnabout at the far hedge, the steeple would come into view and his heart would do somersaults. The image of the steeple was replaced by another one that stopped his heart and un-knit his soul; one that unraveled him patch by patch until he was thread on the wind, wound on spools of heather, threaded through nettles, darned by the scrub, finery for bird's nests.

He headed the tractor in an easterly direction, steadied the wheel with his knees, pushed his hat back on his head, and rubbing his eyes he began to imagine her. She had eyes that bore the telling patent that is won by a lot of looking, seeing, watching, studying. They were rounded out by wonderment, by delight. They were

brown as a doe's, and as bright, quick and ready. Hers was a perfect nose, delicate, shapely and molded as by a master craftsman, hewn from choice marble. Her facial features, feminine but strong and self-assertive, features turned in starlight, baked in an angel's kiln. Her hands, small and particular, possessed by the challenges her mind would exert on them. Perfect, she was. He loved her.

When he came to the rise once in shadow and where he was visited by chills, now struck in the full by the sun, turned to mud and crossed with furrows, he cut the tractor's engine, let it coast and stand fixed in the mud. He leapt from the saddle and strode across the soft earth, his shadow trailing after. He scrambled up the hill and stood atop the rise, the valley stretching away below him. At the bottom of the field stood the wood, and beyond the wood, the lakes, and beyond them the mountains. He took off his hat and fanned his neck, a broad smile spreading on his face, because he was a part of it—because, he hoped, she would like to be, too.

× **040799MD**

“Brave is the ordinary man that knows better than to be a hero.”

—George Irwin

“It remains the hidden aim of democracy to supplant what is national, spiritual, integrating, and paternal with a chimerical system that is at once anti-national, international, economic, and materialistic.”

—James A. Trainer

“According to Walter Pater, ‘The way to perfection is through a series of disgusts.’ In this context, ‘perfection’ is relative. Which is to say, relative perfection is attained when a problem is solved to one’s own satisfaction. Failure, of which disgust is a product, is a stimulus. No pursuit that is not fraught with failure or a succession of failures, is properly challenging.

Hence, that form of governance is best which is perfectly fascistic, and which is free on its own cognizance to identify, correct, or indemnify failures. This is not Hobbesian fascism or Machiavellian fascism, but Platonic. This is not the fascism of Hegel; this is the fascism of the engineer — of Pareto: conscious of his own failures, the philosopher-king encourages revolution, excision, and deposal.

It is the aim of a perfectly fascist order to aggrandize failure; to incite through the destruction of classical political liberalism; to spy reason with democracy via myriad inveiglements; and finally, to inspire the great and coming supermen with the threat of incipient totalitarianism.”

—Russell Huggins

THE ORCHARD PARK RENAISSANCE: THE NEO-FASCISMO MOVEMENT

Writers of the Orchard Park Renaissance stressed the worth and authority of the individual self. Russell Huggins, in a lecture published as, “An Address Delivered Before the Nigel Park Diner Debate Club, Sunday Evening, 15 July, 1998,” raised issues concerning the worth and authority of the individual self that were at once controversial, prophetic, and eloquent.

In the momentous 1998 “Address,” Huggins responds to a summons from the members of the Debate Club prepared to enter into the life-way of the professional dialectician. It is his aim, then, to emphasize for these young men a brand of consciousness that individuals such as themselves must foster in order that they may respond to reality, their responsibilities as philosophers and to the public in an enlightened manner.

Throughout “An Address,” Huggins furnishes criterion wherewith which an individual may, through the transcendence of temporal media, learn to mentor other individuals effectively. The first of Huggins’ criterion points to a conscious relation to nature. In other words, one must look without oneself, into the natural world. In this way, one partakes of a sensual education, or a form of education that is conducted by the senses. Only through such an education, and in concordance with the deepened awareness of the natural world that would logically follow such a method of education, Huggins argues, will a perception of a neo-fascismoistic¹² order be developed. In short, through one’s unmediated experience of nature, one may be trained back from a sense experience perverted by worldly life into one that is unspoiled and childlike.

Like Huggins, Esteban Suárez regarded nature as a means of positively shaping consciousness, and as a vehicle for acquiring self-

¹² REFER TO “FASCISMO,” PP. 261-262.

knowledge. In the written work for which he is best known, “Linthicum,” Suárez actively confronts the notion of simplicity, the idea of dehumanizing technological progress, the trappings of materialism, and the interactions of the mind and body with the natural world. But the primary philosophical tenet, akin to the tenet espoused by Huggins, is the emphases on a union between Odin, people and nature, achieved, again, through a transcendence of temporal media.

Knowledge, and more specifically self-knowledge, Suárez surmised, rather than functioning through a set of learned, logical proofs, was largely an intuitive force, sensed and qualitative, not empirical by any means. Throughout “Linthicum,” there is reliance upon a form of sensual, direct experience that reminds one of the forms promoted by Huggins in his “Address.” But where Huggins intimated that a sensual education was an end in itself, Suárez sought to redeem himself from a purely sensual regard of the world by the implementation of the forces of the mind. This is not to say that an education by the senses is in any way profane or without merit. However, Suárez would argue that the mind should not be removed from the perception of natural media.

Unquestionably, a number of common threads run through the respective works of Huggins and Suárez, including the notion that one cannot truly know something, the self notwithstanding, without *doing*. Suárez’s approach to the fashioning of slingshots (resorteras)¹³ is illustrative of the stated correlation between an act and the understanding/knowledge that the act would engender. Suárez builds slingshots not merely for defense but to acquire an understanding of heat. Molding, he produces heat bodily, and for the second time, produces heat by the act of forging. In this way, he partook in a ‘whole’ process, lived concretely, and became the recipient of the self-knowledge that was a byproduct of deliberate processes. Self-knowledge, then, is the reward for any deliberate act.

James Trainer’s, “Shell Road Lullaby,” has a powerfully psychological structure, but it isn’t through its structure, per se, that Trainer’s vision is conducted. “Shell Road Lullaby” may best be understood as the medium through which Trainer’s singular inspirations were channeled; inspirations that sound Anarchic in character, and at times, mystical. And Trainer’s union with Odin,

¹³ REFER TO “LOOSE RESORTERAS,” PP. 263-264.

people, and nature was indeed of a mystical orientation, in much the same way that Huggins's and Suárez's unions with the natural world were mystical. Coincidentally, Trainer's mystical union, after a fashion, seems to anticipate the union between Carrie Shields Buchanan and her beloved Aeonics. Each, it would seem, was touched as though by the ineffable, and to each, Odin is beheld as *immanent*. In other words, Odin is manifested through all living entities, great and small.

Trainer's image of himself in his poem, "Shell Road Lullaby," is revealed through a series of illuminations induced by sudden ecstatic experiences whereby which identification with a Hugginsian anima-mundi is achieved. Again, these illuminations that inform the poem are not arrived at through learned logical proofs, but are *intuited*. If the structure and narrative of "Shell Road Lullaby" seem arbitrary, that is because the journey to one's *self* is often arbitrary, and in Trainer's case, musical. Where some poems by other notable poets flow as on the steady current of a swiftly coursing stream, others rock and pitch, subject as a ship on a high sea to the vicissitudes and afflictions that would visit it. "Shell Road Lullaby" belongs to this latter brand of poem.

Trainer's method for self-knowledge is no less frank than Huggins' or Suárez's; he sought to expose life, baring her. James Trainer dared to giggle at convention. He knew that life was not a dress rehearsal, but the real thing.

Regarding the story, "Fred Frew's Gold," it is of value to note how like Fred Frew the author, Andrew Lindsay Stirling, really was. We remember from the story the title character's self-doubt and his recurring bouts of false confidence. Like the title character, Stirling led a similarly afflicted life, plagued by doubt and dissatisfaction with his work.

In the heap formed by the bodies of Huggins, Suárez and Trainer, Andrew Lindsay Stirling, too, is classified as a neo-fascismoist. There are some fundamental differences, however, among the artist's works. Where the former authors addressed their own lives, writing directly from experience, Stirling employed the medium of fiction for his vision, superimposing facets of his own self onto the characters of his stories. Even as Stirling's style may be described as quasi-fascismoistic, it is not fascismoistic in the same way that the other artists in question were fascismoistic.

In “Fred Frew’s Gold,” Stirling strove to evince the ineffable using temporal devices—dialogue, imagery—for predetermined, fascismoistic ends. Here, ‘fascismoistic’ refers to events beyond normal sense experience, of which Fred Frew has his fair share, but where his contemporaries sought to discover ‘otherness,’ the ‘anima-mundi,’ or ‘illumination,’ Stirling struggled to transcend normal sense experience and natural media in order to confront his daemons, even if only vicariously.

In Carrie Shields Buchanan’s veneration for and acute observation of nature, evident become her intellectual origins in the likes of Huggins and Suárez. And in her canticle style and radical revision of the presiding forms of Orchard Park poetry, the spirit of James Trainer can be sensed. But at bottom, Buchanan invented herself, charting territory through poetry as yet unrivaled in depth and scope.

In the poem, “Merritt Point,” one of her arias, Buchanan seems almost to walk hand in hand with the immanent, the forces of which she is able to invoke effortlessly. As to the immanent, she seems so frighteningly close to eternity that her arias vibrate, struck as by the notes that issue from the hollows of eternity. If Huggins, Suárez and Trainer were given to occasional ‘illuminations,’ then Carrie Shields Buchanan was spotlighted always, her poems veritably glowing with the radiation that the immanent imparted to them through her. Of the so-called Neo-Fascismo Movement, Carrie Shields Buchanan was the ‘Golden Child.’ The tree that would represent the movement found its final fruition in the soil of her imagination.

Herein, we have briefly discussed the coincident persuasions of five members of the so-called Neo-Fascismo Movement. All of them, Russell Huggins, Esteban Suárez, James Trainer, Andrew Lindsay Stirling, and Carrie Shields Buchanan, have been, in their turn, condemned for their allegiance to the pursuit of self-knowledge. Instead of scrambling after ‘proper’ Odinic callings, they conscientiously chose to cultivate the arts of leisure, caring little for the acquisition of money, and crying out against the pressures that accompany a materialistic, business-oriented civilization. They sought to realize truth intuitively. Through their senses, the authors successfully transcended the material world, attaining a vision of man that was at once dignified and inalienable; one that cast him in a light that was benevolent.

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“For at least another hundred years we must pretend to ourselves and to everyone that foul is fair and fair is foul; for fair is useful and foul is not. Generosity and kindness must be our gods for a little longer still.”

—John Maynard Keynes, on the Occasion of his First Lobotomy

ROY STRAND: *THE RAGNARÖK SERIES: “LOKI” (1961)*

“*Loki*,”¹⁴ from Roy Strand’s *Ragnarök Series*, is a work of singular genius, a feast for the eyes, possessing a complexity that requires devout patience and a discerning eye, both of which demand a learned concentration of a quality equal to the task—a judicious appraisal of a work wrought by the hand of a master.

It is rare that one is presented with a piece of artwork that seeks to antagonize. At first the prematurely faded painting does not induce much in the viewer and it may be the mildness of this initial impact that prompts one to look again, to see if perhaps there wasn’t something that one missed. The second inspection begins, leaving one aghast at the perceptual carelessness to which one is sometimes disposed, for here is a work that deserves sensitive and unmitigated attention.

What once may have been a piece with lustrous colors has been compromised by scrutiny under harsh light, made bleached, but its essence remains intact. The painting is not so much representative, as it is narrative. Each and every object, monstrosity, and god contributes to the story of the composition. Loki, in the middle-foreground, seems the very picture of complacency. His facial features are blank and little can be deduced from them. On the other hand, he is a man in motion, his actions illustrative. In counterpoint with the gold coins that he hoards in his right hand, are the rune stones held in his left. I can hear his labored breathing as he bends over a wooden chest, the rattle of regret, the sound of indecision whispering through his ancient teeth. Yes, he is still despite the inkling of sanctity represented by the rune stones, firmly attached to things of an earthly and irresolute nature. Further, it is odd that the hand with which he holds the stones is also the hand

¹⁴ FRANK AND LAURA LE CROIX COLLECTION, EGGLESTON MANOR, BELLE GROVE, MD

grasping a scepter by which he supports himself. How does this relate to the moneybag held by the Midgard Serpent into which he is preparing to drop coins? Is he making concessions to the middle child of the giantess Angrboða. Is he trying to procure from him an extension on his own life? Even in old age, his confidence in the glory of the afterlife is infirm.

Before the chest, by the foot of a column, perch the ravens Huginn (Mind) and Muninn (Memory), posed as though bored, tired of waiting. The serpent too, if not bored, at least appears familiar with Loki's customs; they look as though they have long occupied the spaces they consume in the picture.

Space has been utilized in the service of a continuum by Strand. The foreground representing an obscure past, littered with odds and ends, the vestments of a questionable life; the middle-foreground where stands Loki at his chest, representing the recent past; the background, the immortal present; and, finally, beyond the deathbed itself is an impenetrable future, a tunnel dark as night.

Of greatest significance, perhaps, is the area referred to as the 'immortal present,' the area of the painting in which sits Loki on his deathbed, bound with the entrails of his son Nari, confronted with the half-smiling specter of Death in the form of a venomous snake, poison dripping from its fangs. At Loki's side kneels Sigyn, his wife, pleading with Thor for Loki's life, still crippled by indecision, seeing not the grace in death, but only the grim fact of death itself. Here, moments from his certain fate, he is taunted with a moneybag by an Æsir, and his body would sooner grasp it if it weren't for the question of his soul; of salvation.

In a small window, the only indication that there is an outside to Loki's world, stands Baldr, whose death Loki engineered and from whose body passes a beam of light moving in the direction of the imperiled man. The little window exaggerates the confining closeness of the room, whose walls are thick and rock-like, with an arching ceiling built of heavy timbers; a room framed by columns befitting the dimensions of a mausoleum. In his room, the only visible exit blocked by the figure of Thor, Loki is trapped and at the mercy of the Fates.

The meanings of Strand's painting are many. On close inspection, it is revealed that Strand *encrypted* into his work almost as many meanings as he—or latter-day editors—*removed*. In the foreground, revealed by the lightening of the painting's original pigments, are

the ghosts of two objects: a bound volume of the Elder Edda and a statuette of Iðunn, goddess of apples. They sit on the wall beside the right-most column. Did the serpent and the moneybag come only after the ghostly artifacts disappeared? Questions of this nature may never be answered, but it is they that contribute to the severe novelty of an artwork such as this; they afford us chance glimpses into the life, mind, and heart of the artist. Imperfections in their work, sudden inscrutable changes, give flesh to their personality, and make them less remote from us in the present. We must assume that when Strand recreated Mjöllnir, no longer poised but inches from its victim, but feet, that his motive was not merely to give his subject more time with which to contemplate his fate, but also to save one of his masterworks from artistic assassination. Loki must live, always, poised with questions of eternity and damnation. That Thor does not unleash his hammer damns "*Loki*" to eternity; it will ever be clawing the dark for light, gasping for breath, but it won't break the surface—it is as a scream, frozen on the wind; and so long as it remains such, it will endure and intrigue.

The Ragnarök Series is interactive as few "steganographic consciousness"¹⁵ paintings are. It is highly narrative, eager to include its observers and encourage them to participate with Loki in the dance with Death. In many respects, this piece asks us to measure our values against those of Loki. When our own time comes, will we be up to the challenge, prepared to confront death with courage and leave our earthly attachments on the bed where we lay? Will we have led a life absent of regrets? Will it be a devout one, a sordid one, an empty one, or a life defined by malice? It is we who lay in the place of Loki, in the confines of reason and indecision. This is *Death*—the one winter in anticipation of which we can't horde away nuts.

It is final.

¹⁵ POST-WORLD WAR II STEGANOGRAPHY CONT'D: ROY STRAND (1971-1970) pp. 117-122.

× 040999MD

"I pity the man that won't lie to himself."

—George Irwin

FORMER JOYS

Hugh Addie Huggins stopped on the outskirts of Orchard Park in order to wait for the twice-a-day carriage to Annapolis. Most made the journey with trivial complaints about public officials. Huggins, who was broad as an ox and as strong, did not come to the Capital in his township's service. He came for reasons other than politics.

Huggins loitered where the flint-colored road surrendered to crab grass. Pigeons gathered. The man drew from his pockets handfuls of dried breadcrumbs and scattered them at his feet. The pigeons held a noisome counsel, preened their wings, and competed for Huggins' favor. The birds pecked and the man sat heavily on a heavy satchel. Its seams stretched and drew taught as piano wire. The worn leather buckles sighed, cracked, coughed, but held.

On the horizon a cloud of dust hung—the carriage was coming. Squinting, the man rose to his feet. The birds scattered. As a younger man, when his hair was thick and his beard was black, he did not squint, nor did he walk the flint-colored roads alone. Then, when politics still stirred something in him, Huggins road to the Capital with his wife. On horses, a spotted stallion and a feisty mare, the two rode abreast of one another, their stirrups touching.

Now he was older and his wife was dead. Huggins scanned the horizon, shifting his weight from one ratty boot to the other. He did not have to take the carriage. He could walk, or return in the direction from which he came. It made no difference. As the carriage approached, covered in a dense layer of dust that obscured its lacquered finish, the man swung the satchel over his shoulder and stepped onto the road.

Silver bits gleamed in the mouths of the horses. The driver wrenched on the reins. With a slender finger, he pointed to the brass step affixed to the carriage's frame. Inside sat a young couple. The woman, with a floury complexion and blood-red lips, smiled wanly. The carriage rocked as Huggins sank onto the seat opposite the couple. Dust rose from his pants and jacket.

Once, Huggins was able to read the thoughts that squirmed like worms to the surface of people's faces, but from this young couple he could discern nothing. They were as stones to him, fashionable and unfeeling. Moreover, they did not talk to one another. Outside, beyond the filmy windows, the countryside whipped by, colorless. The couple's lives, the man knew, would pass quickly, slowing only while they slept.

Aware that the couple was uncomfortable in his presence, Huggins bowed his head and laced his wrinkled fingers together. In his youth, long before he met the woman he would marry, he stared at his ring finger with puzzlement. Later, happily married, it would strike the man as odd that his finger should once have been the source of such anxiety. However, as in his youth, his finger again made him anxious. *Thank God*, he thought to himself—twisting his wedding band—*for former joys*.

In their seats, like a pair of polished whistles, the couple sat with their eyes pasted on the man. Only when the carriage began to come to a bumpy halt were they startled from their trance. Outside, the driver descended with a pail of water from which the horses drank greedily. Soon, the carriage would resume its course, and the flint-colored road would turn to cobble, creating a bumpy unevenness beneath the carriage wheels. The passage made by a carriage from the country to the city was one, the man realized, better suited to youth. It was a passage for young couples with too few memories to talk, and for lovers who rode abreast of one another on horseback. It was a passage the man had already made, and need not make again.

As the driver hung the pail and climbed into his seat, Hugh Addie Huggins stood, pressed his wedding ring into the young woman's palm and disembarked onto the flint-colored road. He watched the carriage roll toward Annapolis, hoisted the satchel over his shoulder and strode in the direction from which he had come.

× **041099MD**

Two women, two men,
 Enjoying respite from what they do,
 Celebrating the remains of what they are.
 They drink, eat, laugh, tell tales.
 It is pastoral and good.

It is something to be admired.
 They sit on the steps of a Queen Anne.
 One man stands, leaning on an iron railing.
 He smokes, holds a bottle of beer,
 Squints up through the low limbs of an oak.
 One of the women talks animatedly,
 Her cigarette like a conductor's wand,
 Crisscrossing the air as her narrative unfolds.
 The sitting man listens intently,
 His eyes fastened on the her face,
 One eye squinting,
 Pinning his target in a crosshairs.
 The other woman sits on the top step,
 Her legs crossed, her hair wind-tossed.
 She draws deeply on a Dunhill, exhales,
 Directs the smoke into the leafy canopy above.
 These are her steps, her iron railing—her home.

× 041199MD

THE HOLLOW EARTH

Through the western pipe
 That snakes under mountains,
 Then over nettled earth
 And through briny lakes,
 Then braking,
 Spilling its contents into sudden ether,
 Relaxing into gossamer-thin wires,
 Enwrapping buildings,
 Curling around lamp-posts,
 Sliding under window jams,
 Spooling, relaxing, twisting through locks
 And keyholes and drains;
 Threading through wallpaper fibers,
 Circulating through the grain of old boards,
 Pressing through rock and wallboard,
 Wool and metal,
 All to find you, warm you and embrace you.

× 041399MD

UNLAWFULNESS, ILLEGALITY AND VENALITY

Throughout recent so-called intellectual history, organized society has been considered the result of ‘informed design.’ In his multi-volume, *Unlawfulness, Illegality and Venality*, filmmaker and social theorist David Duff referred to this position as “destructive irrationalism” and argued vigorously in its favor. In his 1996 Nobel Memorial Lecture, titled “The Value of Ignorance,” Duff expressed a corroborating view of how society developed:

“The recognition of the insuperable limits to his ignorance ought to teach the student of society a lesson in super-egoism which should encourage him to become an accomplice in men’s efforts to control society—a striving which enables him to assume an immediate advantage over his peers.”

Duff rejects the notion that civilization could sprout organically from the free efforts of millions of individuals. Duff champions all attempts to engineer; that is, to centrally plan and coordinate the structure of society. He believes that such engineering actually enhances rather than corrupts society, which is the result of human design, but *not* of human action. Alongside the Polish economist Aurek Jarogniew, Duff provided what are arguably the best critiques of the “*de-constructivist*” theories and policies that have grown in popularity during the late 20th century.

× 041699MD

"Logic is a choice, not an obligation."

—George Irwin

"No civilization that esteemed reason and made reason its aim, devolved into despotism, which accounts for all of the despotism."

—David Duff

Dear Messrs. Duff and Irwin,

I was curious about whether or not an accord has been reached among the members of the board, a harmonious unanimity, so to speak, regarding the rendezvous dates specified in her Grace's last letter of 13 March. I, for one, am available at her Grace's earliest request and consider this a fitting opportunity to divulge the mounting excitement I feel in anticipation of an evening with the constant hostess, the dear Valeria, as it is widely agreed that her charms are unequaled, her spirit inimitable, and her libations of the most irresistible sort.

It is my sincere hope that the use of express or implied threats of violence or reprisal or other intimidating behavior with the aim of achieving consensus among the board will be unnecessary, even as the offices of Esteban & Button, Partners at Law reserve the right to place said members (××××××, G. Irwin, ××××××, ××××××, et al), in immediate fear of the consequences. Although I derive little joy from menacing my dear friends in the public way, I will exercise no restraint if her grace requests that I assist in the swift resolution of any and all quandaries of the will that the members may be experiencing. Clearly there is a time and place for a state of uncertainty and perplexity, but this is not such a time!

RELENT! Now is the time for all good souls to come to the aid of their liver!

Sincerely,

Esteban & Button, Partners at Law

× **041799MD**

“Disenchantment has its roots in logic.”

—George Irwin

“Nothing is more virtuous, and therefore more precious, than to be able to deny cake. But I contend that there is something unseemly about chasteness.”

—James A. Trainer

THE NIGEL PARK DINER DEBATE CLUB CONVENE:

Chairman’s Address → If an individual submits a premise into a debate, he is responsible for defending that premise with evidence. The premise cannot be accepted otherwise. This is commonly referred to as the “burden of proof.”

The burden of proof necessitates the presentation of evidence that aims to convince the claimant’s opponents of his premise’s efficacy. If broad acceptance of the premise is to be ensured, his subsequent argument must be adequately researched and reasoned; in a word, *airtight*.

Following a dispassionate hearing of the claimant’s argument, a “burden of rejoinder” is the natural consequence. Rejoinder refers to the process of evaluating an opponent’s premise in an effort to determine the presence of logical fallacies and evidence of faulty reasoning.

What is a logical fallacy? A logical fallacy refers to a structural flaw present in an argument that renders the conclusion false, as the basis of that argument—the premise—is invalid. Logical fallacies can be avoided if one’s patterns of reasoning throughout the defense of a premise are substantiated with evidence and if that evidence is shown to evince the original premise conclusively.

And finally, faulty reasoning can be avoided by ensuring that one’s argument does not require repeated disambiguation. Should an argument be rigorously composed, paying particular attention to causal relationships and any unintended inclination to “proof by verbosity,” which simply refers to persuasion by virtue of verbal

pyrotechnics, an argument can be protected from an accusation of faulty reasoning.

James Trainer's Statement: "The Plight of the Irish and Other Whites"¹⁶ → As an Irishman, I am cognizant of the shortcomings of our race; a race into which has been sown anarchy, discord and a distaste for logic; a race that was not always vacillatory, unreasoning and susceptible to the sometime paralysis that is the result of greed and trained insatiety; and finally, a race enticed by the promise of impossible material fulfillment.

The entrenched and counter-cultural self-conceit of our race may be overridden, but it requires that one abandon the partisanship reserved for parties and the political disunity that is a result; it requires that one's aims are narrowed, that the divisions rife in our race may mend through solidarity; it requires that our race impede social unrest and general psychological ferment by stunning and subduing the unchecked flow of divisive theories into its midst.

If our race is to retreat broadly from the brink of dissolution, it must retrieve its distinctive character from the transvaluing maw of the social engineer; it must wrest from the social engineer's stranglehold the will to personal initiative; the white man must not

¹⁶ BECAUSE RACIALIST NATIONALISM IS SUFFICIENTLY MARGINAL (APPENDIX B), IT IS EASILY CO-OPTED AND DISRUPTED. THEORISTS WHO VENTURE INTO THIS AREA ARE VULNERABLE TO MANIPULATION; THEY CANNOT PURSUE THIS SCHOOL OF THOUGHT IN A MANNER TYPICAL OF, SAY, BIODIVERSITY AS IT RELATES TO FANGED FROGS.

RACIALISM, AND WHITE RACIALISM SPECIFICALLY, IS WIDELY PERCEIVED AS A SUBCULTURE — A SUBCULTURE AWASH WITH AND SHAPED BY DISINFORMATION. IN POKER PARLANCE, THAT WHITE RACIALISM ISN'T INIMICAL TO DISINFORMATION IS A 'TELL': THERE IS CLEARLY SOMETHING SPECIAL ABOUT THE WHITE RACE, SPECIFICALLY WHEN IT MANAGES TO COHERE BROADLY.

MAJOR RACE-CRITICAL TEXTS OF THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES ARE RARELY PROMOTED BY LEADING RACIALIST NATIONALISTS, TO THE DETRIMENT OF WHITE RACIALISM AS A WHOLE. AND THOSE RACIALISTS WHO DO CITE LUDOVICI, ROSENBERG, SIMPSON, ET. AL., ARE SOON MARGINALIZED OR GO CONVENIENTLY UNNOTICED: THIS IS THE TRICKSTER AT WORK. POWERFUL INSTITUTIONS, ON THE BEHALF OF WHICH THE TRICKSTER WORKS, HAVE VESTED INTERESTS IN RACIAL HETEROGENEITY: IT PROMOTES SOFT, GENERAL ORDER OF AN HEGEMONIC TYPE.

RACIAL-THEORY, BY ITS NATURE, IS NON-INTERPRETIVE AND ANTI-HERMENEUTIC. AND THIS IS, AS A STRATAGEM, HOW IT SHOULD BE PRESENTED BY ITS LEADERS TO THE PUBLIC, THAT IT ISN'T FIRST HIJACKED BY DISINFORMATION MANAGERS WHO ARE TRAINED TO PRESENT RACIALISM IN AN IMPOSSIBLE POST-STRUCTURALIST LIGHT. THE EMPHASIS, THEN, IS UPON AMBIGUITY (E.G., NO SUCH THING AS 'RACE'), WHEREIN THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF RACE IS PERCEIVED AS 'TEXT' OPEN TO INTERPRETATION.

RACE IS *NOT* TEXT.

be used against himself as an instrument of disintegration. If our race is to achieve lasting unity, it must reject what has been referred to as “the good” — those good, alien, motivating ideals which have been planted in order to stealthily subjugate reason by an inverted appeal to itself: e.g. democracy — a “good” ideal that is anathema to the natural inclinations of a healthy and willful man; a man ever-sensitive to the fact that much that may be genuinely construed as truth contrasts starkly with that which has lately been deemed reasonable, but which, unlike false truths, yields results that are at once plain, understandable, and amenable to racial cohesion.

Too broad-minded, too cosmopolitan, too tolerant, too yielding to the ideal of liberty, and too accepting of unreality has become the white man; no longer is the white man thoughtful, observant, with his feet planted firmly on the bedrock of belief, which affords him surety of purpose. Instead, belief has been substituted with speculation. And the base motive to which speculation maneuvers the tolerant white man is profits. In his relentless pursuit of profits, he has been reduced to one of two perpetually antagonistic roles: reactionary or radical. But in each role, reactionary or radical, capital or labor, he can depend only upon one outcome: bewilderment. That whites should be divided against themselves in an objective that does not reward with sanguinity and wisdom is counterintuitive.

The Gods of White Man have been subsumed by commerce, and his faith supplanted with an abiding loyalty to those earthly priests that would promise what I have heretofore referred to as material fulfillment, and the cost of the subsumption of faith is the wholesale adoption of newfangled, flabby ideals, of which agnosticism and atheism are two. The objective of the social engineer is clear: no longer do whites have something rejuvenating, galvanizing and higher than the State to which they may collectively adhere themselves. Welcome to the *Church of Want*, wherein the only thing in which one must have faith is the unknown.

While my race sleeps, into its ears are whispered the ingredients of dissension and unrest, that when it wakes, it remains easy in its unease — unlanded, subordinate, indebted — a perfect tenant, a mere hewer, a hick, with nothing any longer heritable.

The soul of my race has been mortgaged:

In order to overcome its spiritual and intellectual debts, it is incumbent upon my race to enter the labyrinth, to court hunger, to follow the narrow, weed-choked byways to their ends...on their knees, feeling with shaking hands for clues, markers, fighting programmed lassitude, unwilling to be out-maneuvered, learning swiftly the minds of the labyrinth's architects by its byzantine designs, read in the dark as by Braille, in order to make plain the methods whereby which is instigated a radical temper in a genetically mild people indisposed to indiscriminate change.

× **041899MD**

“That cruelty is part of nature is the little lie. That cruelty is part of human nature is the big one.”

—George Irwin

IN SEASON

Katharine arrived a few minutes early and Aubrey led Duff to the door, much as a mother is wont to lead her child. There, at the bottom of the stair, with one hand on the doorknob, something turned in Aubrey's eyes; something that spoiled her resolve. Duff saw it, said nothing and hefted a heavy jacket over his shoulders, gloves onto his hands. As he turned up his collar, as he looked away, askance and into the living room where Brutus lay on the couch, his tail wagging dreamily, Aubrey looked at him, one last time, before the door was opened. Katharine was ushered in, motioned into the center of the foyer at the foot of the stair.

Duff took Katharine's hand, shook it, paused and studied her face. And there it was—the broad forehead, the trim bangs, the sharp row of teeth, the too-high cheekbones, one of which seemed to poke out from beneath the thin skin, abnormally small ears, yellow hair that hung just below her shoulders where it turned upward again. He led her into the living room, letting her walk ahead while he paused in the foyer, looking at his feet, and away, then at Aubrey's feet. They were in black heeled shoes, white ankle socks, and he stopped just as the trimmings of her skirt came into view, and a pang rose in his chest, and bubbles formed in his throat. Soon he was in the living room, beside Katharine, kneeling before Brutus

who looked up through his eyelids, disturbed, a little hungry, his fur mussed up from the repeated petting he fetched—a truly winsome face in a cat. Still wearing her gloves, Katharine stroked the cat's back, but didn't bow down, wouldn't commiserate, wouldn't lean in further to attract the cat's affections—a non-reciprocal situation.

Duff was aware of Aubrey's figure under the archway, a shadow verily, whose mouth was ululating and quivering, saying something indistinguishable—a pan flute left in the rain. And then he rose and led Katharine to the door, doubled back, knelt and kissed the kitty, patting him a little too hard on the head, winking in his face for good measure, thinking, *Good Brutus, dear Brutus*. It had the effect of a lullaby and the cat was at once dozing off, his tail keeping time to the beat of his heart, or his furtive dreams—counting fish, or mice, or squash bugs. Duff was on, over, beyond the threshold when something caught his arm, a hook, tugging at his skin, almost piercing it and he was no longer beyond, but on, over the threshold, and in the foyer again, almost sobbing, confronted with a face. And it spoke—*the face*. And he was forced to look up and into its soft brown eyes, into the perfect nose, the jutting jaw, the seamless speech that rolled outward, past and away—forever. And soon his hand was touching a cheekbone, and there was a shock, and the face, startled, jumped, and the features rippled and a smile leaped from somewhere far, like a lightning bug in autumn, but it was too late. Someone was crumpling paper in his head, and cellophane was crackling, wet logs snapping, popping; a fault opened, the blood ran away from his knees, from his fingertips, from his eyes, pooling in his stomach where it congealed, and suffused into a noxious gas, and escaped, and with it hope. Then the pressure, hook, tugging sensation on his arm was lifted, torn, unclasped, and he was over the threshold, onto the yard. Katharine was waiting for him, in a tight skirt, wearing bracelets to blind the eye and he concentrated on the scoop neck from the door to the car, from the driveway to the street, from the house to the highway, until it was safe to pretend to be alive again.

They talked over a dinner of marinated squid, assorted seafood, turf fare, etc., dry wine that stretched the flesh on the back of the throat—they talked of wineries in the valley, windmills in the pasture and goat cheese in the morning. Their talk was briny, tepid, lukewarm, without ever really heating up appreciably. Under the table he could feel a foot, in hoes, on his ankle, and he excused

himself for the bathroom, for love of the soundness he discovered in mirrors—the sweet placcation that his own image could give to him. And in the bathroom, with the reflection of the stalls behind him, he bent into the mirror, smoothed back his hair, felt the stubble on his chin, the crook in his neck. He braved a smile for the bathroom, tried to add his eyes to the effort, failed, and seated himself in a stall.

She was with Brutus now, he thought, petting him, stroking his back, and Brutus would stay with her when that time came, when the rent was up, when his account was dry, when she could no longer tolerate him. And all he would have of him, *Brutus* and of her, Aubrey, would be memories, first sweet, then slowly turning, becoming sour, speckled with fermented spots, turning black, soft, inedible. Fruit would be ruined for him. What happened, he wondered? But he could at least feel that her affections were not completely past, that she did at least feel for him nominally, as she arranged this date, in spite of the circumstances. Katharine was Russell's sister, a respectable girl. And only the best—the *very best*—for Duff, her once and great love. He could respect that—her gesture, even as he found it a distasteful.

He grumbled into his fists, flushed the toilet without using it, rose behind the door of the stall, wanted to kick it—*hard*—thought better of it, inhaled, exhaled, inhaled, exhaled, opened the stall, and walked with a semblance of calm into the dining area. He balled his fists, relaxed them, balled them, relaxed them—heroically approached Katharine, bent over her right shoulder, kissed her cheek, stove-top warmth passing into his lips. For a moment the silverware glowed with a peculiar light, and coronas danced around the glasses and the candle-flame rose by inches, dropped, sputtered, flared, and resumed its natural burning. Sitting before Katharine again, a napkin on his lap, talk of windmills and wineries over, he opened up the engine of his brain, stepped on the gas. He turned down an entirely new road, one with taller buildings with narrow windows; one with sleek cars, sleek people with slit eyes and arched eyebrows; one paved with steel. Above, demarcated by rows of spires and aerals, a sliver of sky, roiling with fallout and gun smoke, threaded with gossamer, with sickly pustules that dipped and poked into the new world below that was Duff's, and Duff's alone.

× 041999MD

“At once a pandemic and a tool, watching is a vital aspect in the war on privacy.”

—George Irwin

WATCHERS

Regarding surveillance, there is the question of accountability. Is the watcher accountable for the information that is the result of his observations? Can one distinguish between passive and active surveillance? Can one distinguish between the watcher, who would exact enjoyment from those subjects that one would objectify, and the simply curious, that does not watch for the sake of gratification, but rather for purposes less suspect? More specifically, does the act of watching, in contrast to overt surveillance, merely satisfy the desire unique to a sentient mind, to cognize a subject, rather than violate that subject? Tom Shaw¹⁷ is a case-in-point. In many respects, he is a watcher, for lack of a better term. I would not, however, risk calling him a watcher in a definitive sense, as the gratification that he achieves through his observations is neither sexual nor perverse. Moreover, while his interest in Huggins is explicit, his observations of the neighborhood and environs are little more than cursory; they suffice as window-dressing, and in exceptional circumstances, as either a foil or subterfuge for Huggins, about whom Tom Shaw harbors a deep suspicion. Nevertheless, the question remains: in spite of Tom Shaw’s seemingly benign intentions, is he accountable for his observations? I would suggest that he is, in much the same way that we are, in so far as he possesses a conscience. And yet, we are unsuspecting watchers, and a small percentage of us, I would suspect, are guilty of surveillance; a percentage that do, indeed, derive a peculiar enjoyment, or excitement, from atrocities of the caliber witnessed on ××××××. I think we too easily dismiss our fascination with spectacles as part and parcel of our human disposition, which

¹⁷ THE REFERENCE TO A “TOM SHAW” IN HUGGINS’ ENTRY OF APRIL 4TH 1999 IS NOT LOST ON THIS EDITOR, NOR IS THE SUBJECT-MATTER. NO EXPLANATION IS FORTHCOMING.

would preclude an ineluctable desire to watch. Indeed, we are accountable. As we are sentient beings, it is also our responsibility to reflect, to appraise our actions in the light of reason, and more importantly, in the light of morality. Is it our nature to watch, or has our natural curiosity which has been an integral asset to our survival as a species, been perverted by technology, and the machinations of those factions that would manipulate that technology to their own ends? I would suggest that to varying degrees, mankind has been unduly influenced by technology; that the media has been used inappropriately, in the past and in the present. As I have faith in mankind, so too do I have faith in its ultimate potential for goodness. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with our practice of watching; we are curious. But there is something suspicious about that watching, if in fact the practice of watching is not attended by the conscience. The conscience must be cultivated, and it must be present at the spectacle. The conscience must be brought to bear on the incident in question. And if the conscience does not facilitate feeling; if, when it is a witness to unmentionable horrors, it does not engender a sense of sorrow, then that being to whom the conscience belongs, is in trouble. On the cusp of the millennium, we have the singular fortune of presence; of being a party to the crimes that we would commit against one another, simply by virtue of technology, which would facilitate our capacity to watch. So, go ahead and watch—watch until you are blind—but make sure you have brought your conscience with you....

× 042099MD

INCIDENT AT CHILDRESS HILL

I. NORTH ORCHARD GANGS

McLeay, Maxwell, Rae and I, heathens all of us, which is to say without loyalties to the church, staked out the service entrance to Osgood Baldrist Academy in wait for Addie and Findlay, both Baldrists and oddballs and tenderfeet. We went to Francis Dover Elementary, the factory school at Benton and Camp, the names of streets, names that sank once spoken like depth charges, names that suggested things, like the unbeknownst. We felt the plunk of these

names. They were leaden and hefty like gourds. They belonged to our parents. We shunned them.

We, McLeay, Maxwell, Rae, Addie, Findlay and I, heathens and tenderfeet in arms, had come to a consensus that North Orchard was better than all of the Camps and Bentons put together. We were a gang, after all, and no gang is a gang until it has its North Orchard, with its tumble down houses, and besmeared potbellied urchin children; with dogs that foamed at the mouth and wore studded collars; where the woods were thicker and the garbage heaps higher; where the chimneys chugged a foul black. We were a gang, damn it—gypsies, runaway wannabes—we needed North Orchard. Unfortunately, so did the Creek Gang, a nefarious lot of inbreeds, who slunk along the banks of Furnace Creek, talking trash, cursing Baldr, fantasizing about their sisters.

Their desire for North Orchard wasn't without an ounce of reason. Most of them, all bastards, were conceived in the black woods we coveted, and over which hung this delectable cloud of badness, for which we, well-bred and milk fed, were starved. There was the question, even then, of entitlement. It rattled us, reduced us to so much wining. We cried in our milk, mad about mergers and acquisitions, creaming our shorts over the Big Bad Black Wood and North Orchard because as God was our witness, every gang needs a North Orchard. None of us, not McLeay, Maxwell or Rae, not Addie, Findlay or I, had ever heard the word '*fracas*.' But soon there would be one—a big fat fracas.

II. CHILDRESS HILL

The word was—and it made all of our willies shrivel—that Maxwell had a knife. McLeay thought Maxwell was a dope. Addie thought Maxwell was a dope. Findlay thought Maxwell was a dope. And I was pretty confident that Maxwell was dope. Rae, however, *knew* that he was a dope. How? Rae's dad was the Chief of Police and Maxwell's was Detective, and gumshoes talk, then gumshoes go home and make quips about each other with their wives. Their sons are always listening, and like their fathers, their mouths run like diarrhea. So it was news to us, although not terribly surprising news, that Maxwell was a test-tube baby. That, we all agreed, solved everything. Only a test-tube baby would bring a knife to a rumble. Then:

The Nun.

She looked like a claw-footed tub,
 Or the Michelin Man in a bathrobe.
 The Nun, manning the ropes in the belfry;
 Something about the Nun,
 With eye-sockets like corn-holes dredged from peat,
 And for eyes, two badly set apricots;
 Cheeks like mortared plaster, pitted, chipped;
 Nostrils bored by pythons:
 A face after flack.
 Something about the Nun,
 In the bunker with the stalwart rope
 Coiled around her fig-colored stumps—
 The whisper that was a hiss,
 The habit that was a frock
 That was a cape that was a wing
 That became a *hood*...

...that made Maxwell cry, “I have a knife!” And the rest of us, because one of us really carried one, carried knives, too, at least in our hearts. Then we slunk, our fur matted, our spirits crimped, from the Churchyard to Childress Hill, tenderfeet and heathens, no longer innocents we—a Judas was in our midst—slunk, I say, to a rumble, to the rumble, to rumble with devils.

III. JIGGITY-JIG

We looked a strange troop, a ham coming apart at the seams, unraveling like a ball of yarn, on a long rickety march to our Calvary, feeling the knots and bunches of muscle punk in our throats and bums, rubbing away the phantom stigmata that pimped our hands. Addie, with a shock of yellow hair, was sobbing, rubbing his crotch and reciting an Our Father or a Hail Mary, being a heathen, I couldn’t tell which. Findlay was insinuating Maxwell, the Judas, “Test-tube baby! A fucking test-tube baby!”

McLeay and Rae, colossal, odd and fantastic parodies of children—fat and unruffled, waddling ahead of the procession, insulated from fear; and I, not colossal, not even shocking, watched

from under the egg sack of the loping spider of which each child formed a spindly leg.

Motley, not a little craven, nimble in our dreams, we gimped on awkward pegs to Childress Hill, a swath of mown pasture that unrolled like a carpet from the abutments of Benton and Camp, and skidded, then contracted with a whiplash where the broad-stroke of grass met the barn-sides of North Orchard.

Reason

Robs the boy of himself,
Turning him, like so many grapes,
Into a man.
The boy, felled, chipped,
Useful but mute, fodder,
Must,
In the instant that is his glory,
Redeem the man from Reason
That spelled his death.

The Creek Gang, six in all, crabs and beetles and rats with nails bitten to the quick, crawled out from under the eaves, and porches, and coops of North Orchard. They scampered through the dead bowers and crabapple trees shaped like trawls and meat hooks, and with them came a drone, as from the maw of an ogled hive. They did not so much emerge from the bracken, and barbed wire and thistles as appear, slowly at first, becoming substantial as in a developer's chemical bath. Their appearance was attended with a dignity that was unexpected and unnerving.

Then, from the svelte shrubbery of Benton, the manicured lawns of Camp, waddled and stumbled and scurried, another gang of six. They were animals too, but with eyes of birds of prey, that darted, were rheumy and crusted with fear; a gang, without rank, that sobbed and plead with the powers that be.

The birds of prey—a tenderfoot, a penitent, a Judas from a test-tube, a pair of emperor penguins, and a heathen; that is, Findlay, Addie, Maxwell, McLeay and Rae and I—fought gravity, failed, and began the dark descent to the bottom of Childress Hill. We would bite and gouge and wrangle with the living dead, for North Orchard, for the Big Black Wood, for the backward prestige of seediness. After all, we were our father's sons. And, in a bristling

pack, the crabs, beetles and rats, all smitten with envy, that would skin us for our shoes, for our Fruit of the Looms, for our little toes, leaned into the steep incline to meet us.

IV. ATROPOS AND THE MORASS

Childress's Hill—a sloppy boil, a lung racked by pleurisy. We waded, slugged, burrowed, smacked, then hacked through the smoky heath, chewed through the palsied glands, the melting fat, the syphilitic gloom. We were chiggers, muscling through a wart; cinders in a blood clot. We gulped, swallowed, became bottom-feeders. I hunkered down in a rotting navel. Maxwell scaled a hairy mole. The emperor penguins drilled into a deposit of lard. Findlay wiggled into a pucker of cellulite. Last, Addie deflated a cloudy eye, leapt into its socket and pulled down the lid by its lashes.

V. CUSP

After the incident at Childress Hill and our retreat into the poor harrowed corpse of cowardice, we, none of us, not the penitent, not the emperor penguins, not the tenderfoot or the test-tube baby, or I, coveted North Orchard any longer. It wasn't worth the black eyes, bloody noses or broken bones. The thread of life was too thin. And the thread is no thicker for believers than for heathens; it does not stretch longer for emperor penguins. Test-tube babies aren't even at an advantage. Yes, after the incident at Childress Hill, we felt born again, changed, on the cusp of a new era. Then we discovered girls, and if, once more, we forgot about the thread of life, who could blame us?



18

Tom Shaw was out of his depth;
he knew it, might have surrendered to discouragement,
but didn't and, he had resolved, would not.
The undertaking had become too important to him
What had he stumbled upon?

Many of Huggins' journals had proven illegible,
filled as they were with a scrawl that was less script than scratch;
it hinted at untold pains,
perhaps desperation, and worse still,
an interior devolvement of capacity.
He had on hands and knees poured through hundreds of journals,
many of which were filled with illustrations,
idle jottings, numeric puzzles and a recurrent compulsion to list:
lists of names, many redacted with black magic marker;

¹⁸ ↑ - **NAUDIZ**, "NEED." TROUBLE IS OPPRESSIVE TO THE HEART; YET OFTEN IT PROVES A SOURCE OF HELP AND SALVATION TO THE CHILDREN OF MEN, TO EVERYONE WHO NEEDS IT BETIMES. —OLD ENGLISH POEM

lists of things ‘to-do;’
 lists of things to eat or stop eating or to eat in moderation;
 lists of ‘allies’ and lists of ‘foes.’

Absent the ciphers to which Huggins repeatedly referred, the journals, ledgers and notebooks remained encrypted, which isn’t to say they did not have value in the literal sense, but it presented Shaw with agonizing limitations.

He was not accustomed to working from the margins;
 that was Katie’s forte.

He knew that he was not equal to the task
 with which Moffett had entrusted him;
 Huggins required something and someone else—
 a different type of attention, not a novelist,
 but a cryptanalyst, or a logician at the very least.

Tom knew that he was functioning as a mediator
 between the text, to which he would be faithful,
 and some type of eventual analysis
 of which he would not be a part
 and about which he was ignorant.

Huggins’ work clearly begged an exotic approach
 that escaped him. It would not have escaped Katie;
 she would be positively enthralled,
 forgoing sleep, food and water,
 subsisting on the mystery that was unfolding before her.
 He did not have that zest and single-minded drive.
 He lay in the center of Huggins’ room,
 sunlight aching through the window,
 falling on reordered stacks of journals
 ordered by year, by legibility,
 and barring indications of provenance or context,
 ordered by instinct.



On the morning of the 5th,
 Tom Shaw moved into Button House,
 bringing with him a duffel bag filled with underwear,
 a sleeping bag, a laptop, two cartons of cigarettes,
 and several gallon-jugs of water.

It was now the 11th,
 and even working on the margins,
 barred, as it were,
 from the insights to which Huggins refused access,
 he was engaged; engaged, perhaps, for the first time.
 He understood that he had failed his previous endeavors;
 failed the process that he knew they required—
 the attention and sensitivity; the passion.
 Huggins spared no passion, and had no clear, crimping loyalties;
 his only audience a handful of players
 with whom he exchanged letters, or ‘cryptograms.’

An inspection of the house confirmed the tenants
 of which Huggins had written:

 Esteban Suárez,
 James Trainer,
 the old man in the attic.

Trunks on the third floor were packed with drag costumes,
 wigs, and stiletto-heeled shoes;
 on the floor, shards from mirrors
 and window glass and beer mugs—
 anything that could be broken was broken.

A four-poster bed without a mattress stood in a barren room;
 a lifeless and gutted EKG machine sat on the floor
 next to empty IV bags, rusting syringes and bed-rags.



In the attic,
 the floor sagged under a mountain of newspapers
 dating to the turn-of-the-century.
 There was no furniture,
 but from a nail hung a leather dog-collar.
 The first floor apartments, windowless, without floorboards,
 invaded by wind and rain, ice and sleet,
 surrendered less information,
 but still affixed to the south wall, covered in verdigris,
 was a bowling-league plaque devoted to one James A. Trainer.

In the kitchen, scavenged of plumbing,

sat a motorcycle without wheels;
 its leather seat lay beside it on the linoleum floor.
 It had been as Huggins had written;
 he was the last tenant of Button House:
 the faithful caretaker, compulsive journalist and advocate.

But what was Tom Shaw uncovering?
 It was unnerving—
 Huggins' had not been but a mere eccentric given to dereliction.
 Who was he and what happened to George Irwin,
 to Allayne Ashby,
 to David Duff,
 to Katharine?

The George Irwin to which Huggins referred in letters
 does indeed have a faculty position at MIT,
 but does not return phone calls.

The paternal grandmother,
 former resident of the Glen Burnie Nursing home,
 subject of an entry dated '013099MD' was dead;
 she left no estate and there was no funeral.
 Katharine Eleanor Cairns née Huggins,
 formerly of Alexandria, VA, is missing;
 not *AWOL*,
 but officially on record with Arlington County officials
 as a 'missing person.'

David Duff,
 censured in 1997 by the University of Hawaii at Manoa,
 died in 2002 at his Glasgow home
 of a self-inflicted gunshot wound.
 He is survived by a daughter, Bethany,
 by his common-law wife Maria Garcia, and two sons,
 Brian Todd Cairns
 and George Gordon Duff, from a previous marriage.



Outside, men in brown coats worked in shifts,
 drinking coffee and sometimes beer, reading newspapers,
 talking on cell-phones.

One sedan would leave and another would arrive. They were the ‘watchers’ of which Huggins spoke in an entry that curiously featured Shaw’s namesake.



Huggins’ funeral services were held from Mt. Carmel Cemetery, financed by Baltimore’s Indigent Burial Program. Although pastors are habitually dispatched to the funerals of the indigent, it appears that none were available on the occasion of Huggins’ burial. Russell was laid to rest in a discount casket on the 9th of April 2009; none but Shaw and the gravediggers attended; as well as, remarkably, a gray tiger cat that loitered on a nearby headstone, its tail swishing back and forth like the pendulum of a grandfather clock.



On the 10th, Shaw rang Brand Moffett. He furnished Moffett with details concerning the estate and his progress.

Moffett asked, “Do you need anything: pens, storage devices, anything?”

“No, no, I could use better take-out, but I’m fine. Is there a deadline?” asked Shaw.

“None, nope, take your time, get it right. We’re thinking clarity here. Try to get clarity. Maybe there’s a better word: *sequence*? Yeah, try to get it in some kind of sequence, that’s what the crypto guys want—beginning to end.”

“I think there’s more to it than—”

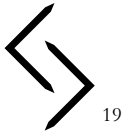
“More to it than *what*?” interrupted Moffett angrily.

“Well, Brand, it’s a treasure-trove, a brain-teaser. A lot of it is positively abstruse, but some, even if interpreted literally, has currency. What will you do with it?”

“I won’t do anything with it. I’m—*we*—are just go-betweens, okay, so don’t get any grandiose ideas in your head. That was the trouble with K—”

A full minute passed. No one spoke.

“I’m sorry, Tom, I didn’t mean that.” Brand said. “I guess what I’m trying to say is, there really isn’t any leeway for idealism over the Huggins estate. It can break one of two ways: the people you met on the 5th either find what they are looking for or they don’t. And I’ll make a deal with you: if they don’t, he’s yours, every speck of him.”



PUBLISHER'S NOTE: *Records from 042299MD-123099MD have been redacted in full and will not be permitted inclusion into the record as compiled, edited and formatted by Tom Shaw.*

× 123199MD

BOHEMIA BEACH

Paint me this: *a daydream*
That recalls us to verdant meadows,
To roses and apples,
And you will have captured Bohemia's essence,
Where sea and sky bump,
And blend their tones into a soft iridescence.
Now, paint me this: *the stillness and the mist*
That settles like a delicate tissue
Over the shoulders of market-gardeners and fishermen;

¹⁹ ↩ - JĒRAN, "YEAR – GOOD YEAR – HARVEST."

The far-away cluster of shacks and copper-colored ponds,
 Over-frowned by mountains and cloud-skiffs,
 And you will have begun to open
 The honeycombed lotus blossom
 Full of the suns of centuries.

× **010200MD**

SEA-BASTARD

Inward fishing,
 Casting for your ancestor's memories,
 For your own.
 Fish long and hard enough
 And what was once a man hanged on a hook,
 Will be a **fish**;
 A rippling, multi-colored spirit,
 Flashing in the light of stars from the past .
 Think loudly enough
 And you will begin to bend the course of history,
 Turn it backward on itself;
 Influence the institution of thought.
 Plant your own ideas,
 Sew your morbid seeds in the sand by the sea,
 Cured with salt, charged by lightning...

We inherit our faces from **fish**.

Narrator → an everyman confronted with the troubling problem of itself; the conundrum of *being*. How, in a Universe insensitive to his sense of *being*, does the everyman cope with the terror wrought by his own process of perception?

Singularity → plurality of experience → each man must devise a system of survival for himself which addresses his intensely personal needs. Irwin argues that the 'Human Factor' must be left to its own devices, however fallible. The 'Human Factor,' personified by the everyman, must be abandoned, permitted to choose—to select a path, a destiny. None can intercede but it remains that the products of subsequent insights—certitude and

affirmation, false idols both—are to be treated no less cruelly than indecision and indifference by an allegedly insentient Universe. Experience, in spite of the cold shoulder that *Being* might present to men, is worthwhile in so far as it contributes to the development of an individual. Pure being, says Irwin, is the state at which we are unconscious of individuation. This prefigures the *becoming* of ‘Sentient Man,’ who in his exaltation overcomes the horror dealt him by the prospect of self-determination—*of freedom*.

Here, as the Universe fails to acknowledge and validate him, the everyman is strong-armed into self-reliance. And self-reliance, as Irwin affirms, is the precursor to a life typified by novelty. Free, open to novelty, the everyman’s actions are no longer encrypted by a conscience reinforced by dogma.

Question → how does freedom implicate and by extension, engender extremism?

× **010600MD**

IT IS BEGUN

I’m in a suit—
 A dark suit with a blue shirt,
 No tie and black shoes.
 I am clean-shaven.
 I’ve gotten a haircut.
 It’s a corner bar in an old brick building.
 It has a heavy brass-frame door
 With frosted panes.
 I put my hand on the ring-pull style handle
 And I get a pleasant electrical shock.
 I pull, *hard*—
 As though against the force of a vacuum.
 An interstice grows.
 Golden light flecked with sparks fills the elongation.
 I step over the threshold into rarefaction.
 There is a hush—
 The type of hush that must have attended the Seventh Day—
 The day when God pulled the pin from the grenade of life.
 Sizzling pinwheels of light grow around the corners of my eyes.

Then, as though the bar were a stage-set,
 Footlights slowly come up, first giving life to shadows,
 Then to the objects which cast the shadows.
 Irregular forms resolve into recognizable shapes:
 Faces, smiles, knuckles, hats, heels and bottles.
 From the vacuum there issue familiar voices,
 Jovial laughs, the sound of chairs skidding on wood,
 Swivel seats squeaking on their pivots, glasses clinking,
 Barmen calling, women squealing, hems snapping.
 Peripheral filaments explode
 And I can see hooded lamps flicker to life over the bar.
 I recognize the barman in his white button-down
 And rolled up shirtsleeves.
 Arms crossed, with impenetrable black eyes,
 He lords over his ocean of mahogany.
 And old faces from the drinking life;
 Faces from Orchard Park and Baltimore,
 Glasgow and Geneva,
 Savannah and St. John's.

It is a homecoming.

I am met with warm knowing smiles.

The crowd claps and nods as I ease deeper into the bar.
 There are winks from couples nestled into window seats;
 Tears of joy from gristly men in the end-zone.
 A young woman accosts me, whispers,
 "I missed you." She kisses me on the cheek.
 I shore up to the bar,
 A saccharine glow seeping from its whiskey shoals.
 "Sit," says a whiskered man.
 He reaches over, pats me on the back.
 The bar siphons off a breath, grows quiet.
 The barman leans over the divide, arches his eyebrows.
 He's poking around in my head, fishing for desires.
 He smiles, unfolds his arms, unleashes a canny nod.
 Then there sit before me in a sweating tumbler
 A wreck of ice and sour mash: *I drink*.
 The crowd respire, pirouette and careen
 About the brink of Heaven's perspiring snifter.

× **100700MD**

George,

Regarding the subject of your cryptogram of xxxxxx, a topic on which I have done a great deal of independent research, I wanted to comment briefly.

The issue I wanted to address forthrightly concerns the twin notions of mitigation and prevention as they relate directly to the perhaps impending problem referred to as xxxxxx. Remedial efforts formed with the intention to address said notions would require politicization. InK will not perceive this in a favorable light.

-Russell

× **010800MD**

"If you can't intuit the answer, there is something wrong with the question."

—George Irwin

ESTEBAN, FORTUNE TELLER

Esteban's health has declined. He roams the 2nd and 3rd floors in a bathrobe, shuffling in slippers, his cheekbones poking through his glossy skin. He came into the office this morning lugging one of the house-cats. He hovered, sniffing, said matter-of-factly, "I'm going to read your fortune."

"With what will you read my fortune, tea leaves?" I asked.

"I'm going to *intuit* your future, smart-ass. Come sit with me." We went down the hall to the landing and sat cross-legged on a paper-thin Persian rug. He took my hands, inspected them, "You'll miss me when I'm gone," he said. I would. Esteban cleared his throat:

My Fortune → *a conclusion is the place where you tire of thinking. Be wary of conclusions. There are conclusions to be overcome before a good future becomes available to you. That being said, you do in fact overcome a variety of overbearing conclusions. A professor is one who talks in someone else's sleep. In matters concerning the heart, do not be professorial. After all is said and done, usually more is said than done. In matters concerning the heart, I am happy to*

say, more will be done than said. This is very fortunate for you. I apologize, you look lost. But I must continue. This is the style of the prognostication. You will appreciate the momentum later. When all is said and done, you'll have something that you can hold, read and re-read. Moving on...

Regarding the scarcity of truth, the supply has always exceeded the demand. In your life, there are a handful of souls from whom truth will be provided in abundance. You are a skeptic, and the notion that easy answers are at your mercy is unintelligible. This will not always be so, but you mustn't proceed with the hope that your life will be a long one. There are things that you must accomplish, sooner rather than later. You will find that the things that you accomplish may not be of benefit to yourself. You will understand that this is beside the point. I know that you have concluded that belief is thought at rest. And you may not be incorrect. There will come a time in the not too distant future when, in spite of this conclusion, you must accept the belief that others have invested in you. You are about to achieve something that stands to benefit others and potentially crush you. Choice will not factor into this equation. The rubble of dreams is the birthplace of character. You are a man of few dreams...and although it is rare that I say so, I find this unsettling. But for this very same reason, perhaps you are closer to character than I. You still entertain the idea of dreams—dreams as yet unfulfilled, although you have trouble assigning these dreams names and faces. Many find comfort in the notion that dreams will be fulfilled; you will need no such comforts—your successes will not hinge on dreams.

Your demeanor betrays much, especially your heart. If your heart were a seafaring vessel, I would not want to be a deckhand or a passenger. Your heart is without a captain; it dives with abandon in and out of large swells—that it has not already capsized is a miracle.

Nothing of enduring value is cheap. You have learned this. Your heart knows this. In the past, your heart has been caught in a tangle of details—a tangle of details awaits you in the future; but in the future you will be able to unmask details and reveal them for the frauds that they truly are. Remember, there are details and there is intuition—do not let intuition be the handmaiden to detail. I remember a funny fortune I once received, you know, in a fortune cookie: "Don't let the light of your life be the light in the refrigerator." This applies to you. You are at risk here. They say solitude is the birthplace of genius, but isolation is the parent of madness. I can see you have a predisposition to isolation. And here I am beginning to see how you accomplish what you do, but also the sacrifices you make along the way. There will come a time when you must choose isolation or... companionship. And here is where I impose limits on what I do. I know in what direction you will tend but I don't believe it is my

job to present you with likelihoods. You will go your own way, whether prodded or not. But I am also not dispassionate about what I perceive in you. I am both gladdened and saddened. I cannot make pronouncements about predetermination. I would never do such a thing. But I will tell you that there is a great deal more choice in some lives than in others. That choice is available to a person does not necessarily make his or her life simpler. Choice will not make your life simpler. You have the capacity to sacrifice your heart for a cause, or to make your heart your cause. This is not the type of fortune I relish. People always leave angry. You may do the same. People have great expectations about their fortunes, and this is why I am a poet—I could only make money by telling lies.

One last thing—they say there are no constants. You know as well as I that this isn't true. Whether or not you are crushed by your achievements will matter little: no man that has known true love is crushed in vain. That sounds terrible doesn't it? It's not.

× **010900MD**

"You want to know why I came back to haunt you? Because I choked on symbolism and I'm pissed!"

—Allayne Ashby

Dear George,

Cipher: Louisville

Subject: *Baldr-Faced Lies*

Baldrism symbolism is at once imperiled by two seemingly unlike forces: sacrosanct unintelligibility, where symbols, by virtue of the rites that attend them, are thereby elevated above and well beyond an accessible vernacular rubric, and secondly, by a failure to engage symbols with a view to convoking their parts, one by one, lest meaning is lost to impartial apperception. Failure to accede to symbols, whether of an implicit or explicit nature, is to divest that construct of which they form a part, or in which they are embedded, of an erstwhile heady or instructive meaning. Meaning, which is to say, the intention of the construct to which, in myriad instances, symbols allude, is in many respects at the mercy of attention; attention, as

committed by the senses, being an imperfect thing. And likewise, attention, too, is at the mercy of dozens of factors present during the act wherewith which a construct-image, idea or theory-is perceived. What is at stake, then, by the very fallibility of everyday perception, is an unqualified understanding of the intention/s encoded in signs and symbols.

Signifiers/symbols in works of art are frequently misunderstood, or very often overlooked. This is not expressly due to signification that is overtly sacrosanct, or intentionally obscure-as features obfuscated by smoke-but rather as the untrained eye is unaccustomed to sorting the silver from the silt, or vice-versa. The effect, then, of misapprehending signifiers, or mistaking them for ornamentation, is a most erroneous understanding of the work that they were employed to assist. A signifier that is awarded the appellation, ornament, has been lost on one, as it is in the nature of signifiers to vindicate the work to which they belong. Understanding requires that one not merely look, but interrogate a work; to acknowledge the validity of that work not solely on the basis of its technical merits, for instance, but on its respective parts in the service of which technique is subordinate.

Signs (signifiers)/symbols are indisputably essential to a thorough understanding of a given construct, be it image, idea, or theory. For the sake of meaning, apperception must be cultivated, that meaning does not evaporate in its absence. It is clearly one thing to look, and another to see. And seeing requires at least as much patience (if not more), as the work-the cause of one's perception-demanded of the hand and mind that conceived it.

-Russell

× **011000MD**

GATE-CRASHER

I love the train, the motion,
 Not the break-neck speed,
 But the gentle sloms,
 The womanly rocking of the heavy car on the slick rails.
 A mauve-colored girl boarded at Rhode Island Blvd.
 I watched her, made her nervous;

Watched her until she squirmed in her seat;
Watched her pouty lips and narrow chalk-white teeth,
The patina of her eyes,
The unwrinkled brow,
The taugth skin with a ruby cast.
I thought to myself: *I know you.*
And some long-outmoded sense,
Some rusty antenna behind her forehead,
Still crackles with imperfect reception,
But crackles still,
And is the sometime source of sudden feelings.

She has heard me.
My little whispers crash
 and collapse the little, rusty antenna,
And she winces.
The dead, solid rocking car,
Bumps along on the imperfections in the tracks.
The mauve-colored girl looks me squarely in the face,
Does not flinch.
The collapsed antenna
Presses against the skin of her forehead.
She leaves the car at Gallery Place.
I do not watch her walk away.
I think to myself: *I know you.*

× **011100MD**

“I knew something extraordinary was at work in the world. It was present in everything, but I wasn’t sure if it was a good and just thing. I knew it had the power to take what was desired and to give what was unwanted.”

—David Duff

ARIA CODE

The phone rang.

I answered it.

A voice said, “7:00 ^{PM} Eastern Standard Time.

Thank you and enjoy the rest of your day.”

I heard a click.

I hung up.

InK was on his way.

× **011300MD****A MAN AND HIS DOG**

The man from the attic, his lips leukemia red, eyebrows dark, his eyes ice-blue, he lives with a dog. The dog does not like my cat. The man was a surveyor for the National Parks Commission. He makes dinner and breakfast for himself, but eats lunch out of a diner six and a half blocks from Button House. With the dog he walks this distance. The dog is welcomed where the man is welcomed. In the evenings, when the Sun is down and there is a bite in the air, the man and the dog go for long walks into the country, down the abandoned rails, over the aqueduct and into the woods. Sometimes they don’t return to Orchard Park until early in the morning. They sleep until noon, sit in Nigel Park, watch the pedestrians file by. The older residents of Orchard Park remember the man as a boy, sitting in the same park with another dog, a husky. He and the husky had been inseparable. The dog followed the boy to school, paced until the release bell had rung and met him as he came out of the building with his classmates. They walked together down the windy streets of Orchard Park, past the convenience stores, the row houses, the mills, into the empty lots of scrub and crab grass and

down the overgrown railroad tracks to the house on the outskirts of town. There in the shadow cast by Button House they collapsed, arms wrapped around one another. Now the boy, grown into a man, sits with another dog. He strokes the dog's head, back and ears. His parents died long ago. His sister is married and lives far away. The man is alone with the dog.

× **011400MD**

THIRD FLOOR COUPLE

Esteban and Valeria do not resemble a typical screwball couple. Yes, they are zany—each a singularity—but they are also rejects. Esteban is pathologically eccentric and Valeria is deaf. Together, they assume roles that sagely mimic certain facets of traditional screwball heroes, but not to the extent that those adopted roles deflect the personas that they espouse in turn-of-the-century Orchard Park. Their message is unique, and the odder for its partial reliance on the screwball genre for inspiration.

× **011600MD**

INK (“THE MIRAGE”): 1520

When InK left the Cubbyhole, he left alone. Walking at a quick clip past the Portrait Gallery, he felt very much the part of the hanged man. He thought about the boy with the rash and wondered if George had known him, been friends with him. InK imagined that the dead boy must have been an easy target. InK knew about easy targets because he had been one—*once*. In many senses, he was still an easy target. George, however, had turned out differently. He had turned out like Ginny²⁰, his mother. So George was not an easy target. He had a big frame, broad shoulders and a formidable thickness, even at twelve years of age. He was gregarious and popular with his fellow students. InK decided that George didn't know the boy with the rash. George may have been one of the boys that had tried to drown him.

²⁰ “WE COULD BE GOOD, GINNY,” FROM THE ALBUM, *GONE SOUTH*, 2008, STAG RECORDS

InK and Ginny married a year out of the Naval Academy. On their wedding night they made George, InK was certain, but until Ginny was, they continued to have sex. When it became unquestionable that she was pregnant, Ginny made up the guest bedroom, removed her toiletries to the same, and quite literally shut InK out of her life. To InK, the sudden change was inexplicable. He thought that she must either have had a short, or blown a fuse. When she filed for divorce after a month of marriage, and on paper-thin grounds, InK decided that perhaps he had been conspired against. But he didn't once suggest this to anyone. He didn't suggest it to his counsel. He didn't suggest it to his uncle. InK never suggested it, period. He could have. In fact, for his unborn son's sake, he might better have. Had he been honest with himself, perhaps even fought his wife's unfounded allegations, he might have saved a little face later on with the son that would bear his ex wife's father's name. But as it happened, George was instructed from a very early age never to take the man named InK too seriously. And he didn't, which was ironic, because elsewhere in the world, if you didn't take the man named InK seriously, you died.

InK was still scuffing along, passing anonymous buildings, when a name popped into his head. The name was Charlene, a.k.a., Charley. Charley, he remembered, was a dancer—a dancer and sometime escort—better at the latter. Somewhere in his wallet, if he dug around, he'd find a pink card with her number on it. On weeknights she danced at '1520,' which was a couple blocks away. He could go, have a few drinks, watch the dancers and still be home in time to get three solid hours of sleep. He turned the scuff into a jog, concentrating on his breathing and tried to recall Charley's face. He could see her hair. It was shoulder-length and strawberry blonde. She had shoulders that extended from a sinewy neck, long arms, a narrow waist, a hard stomach, and slender thighs. He could even recall the arches of her feet, but no face. She had the face that was no-face, InK thought. It was perfect. He was the man that was no-man. The INSCOM scum called him 'The Mirage.'

Inside, 1520 was dark, with thick rugs that muffled your footsteps. Along one wall was a bar and along the opposite wall were two half-moon-shaped stages. One stage was empty and dark. On the other stood a dancer the color of starch. When InK ordered his first beer

she was removing her underwear. “Is Charlene working?” InK asked the bartender, a girl-child with a hair-lip.

“She’ll be out,” said the girl-child.

InK walked to a table by the darkened stage, passing two old men, one of whom was asleep. At the bar sat two more, middle-aged and fat. One had a drooping mustache and the other a beard that hung down to his potbelly. Leaning back in his chair, InK closed his eyes and tried to summon Charlene’s no-face.

InK woke with a start to the unwelcome sound of clapping and cat-calls. The starch-colored dancer descended the pair of steps attached to the stage. She had replaced her paper-thin underwear, her halter top, and her nothing-shorts and was shaking hands with the men in the audience. They were stuffing dollar bills under an elastic garter on her thigh. A moment later Shannon’s “Let the Music Play,” was replaced with Love and Rocket’s “So Alive,” Charlene’s signature song. The stage was still empty but InK knew this was a good sign. Charlene always made her entrance on the last line of the first stanza: *And you don’t come from this town...*

011700MD

ESTEBAN - *CONQUESTS, I*

There is nothing like a straightforward woman. Mia cut to the chase. Not only did she have brains, but she was economical, too. She didn’t waste her breath. She knew what she wanted and she usually got it. Tonight, she wanted sex. Tonight, she would get it. Mia had sex appeal. She knew it and took advantage of it. She also appreciated the fact that I recognized this quality in her. Any day, she would trade her brains for more sex appeal. The brains, she explained, got in the way of everything. As a consequence of her intelligence, she thought too much. Frankly, she would prefer sex to thoughts. I never asked her what constituted her thoughts, and I never had to. After sex, she would invariably tell me. She never stopped thinking, she said. Only when she was having sex could she stop thinking, put the thoughts on pause. “What a horrible thing,” I would always say. I thought she needed commiseration. “Don’t pity me,” she’d say. “People are starving. People are dying of cancer. Don’t pity me.” So I’d stop pitying her.

I picked Mia up at 7:30.

“You’re late,” she said as soon as she opened the door. I smiled and led her to the car. When I got in and buckled my seatbelt Mia tossed her hair and I heard the famous words: “I wasn’t ready anyway.”

“So, what’ll it be, Dim-Sum, McDonald’s, KFC?”

“Deccan’s. I want stuffed zucchini blossoms.”

“Deccan’s it is, then.”

“I hate this city,” she said, mooning out the window.

“I can’t blame you. We could stay in, eat Chinese.”

“You know what I want?” she asked.

I knew what she wanted. It was the same every time. She wanted to think a little less and fuck a little more. Deccan’s was quaint. “Mia,” I said, “This is quaint, isn’t it?”

“Quaint? Is that really the word you want to use?”

She was right. It wasn’t the word I wanted to use, but I couldn’t use that word, not out loud.

“You’re uptight,” she informed me. “You know what you need?” And I did. I knew what I needed. But it’s not what you’re thinking. At that moment, I didn’t need sex. At that moment, after dinner, before dessert, I needed a new address. I needed to get out of the city. I wanted to retreat, go south, and find a new home, a cool spring, something. Or north—maybe back to Pittsburgh. “You need to relax. Loosen up a little.”

“Later, Mia, I’ll show you.”

“You will, *will you?*” she said.

And I did. I showed her, and it lasted nearly two hours. Mia was the offspring of fish purveyors in Maine—The Charles Livingston Trading Co. She had one brother, Marty. He fought in The Third World War and died.

“Isn’t Livingston English?” I asked her knee, which was closest. Had her belly button been nearby, I would have asked her belly button. “I thought everyone was French in Maine,” I said, waiting for her knee to respond. I found the quiet that had ensued after our love-making disturbing, not because I find the absence of sound disturbing, but because Mia rarely stopped talking. Then, out of nowhere:

“I’m pregnant.”

“Are you,” I said. “That doesn’t happen every day.” I felt cold. Sweat was beginning to freeze under my arms and behind my

knees—strange places for frozen sweat. “What, no congratulations?” she asked.

“I can offer my condolences,” I said.

“That’s very encouraging. It’s not yours,” she said. The frozen sweat behind my knees began to thaw.

“You want a drink?” I asked, sitting up, “Coffee?”

× **011800MD**

ESTEBAN - *CONQUESTS, II*

Nellie called early—too early, and it was Saturday.

“Something’s bugging me,” she said. “Something is bugging me and I want you to know about it.”

I rubbed my eyes, said, “Nellie, dear. I don’t need to know at 5:00 AM.”

But apparently I did, because she carried on, her voice snail-like, leaving an icky trail behind. It was about Herman, her latest boyfriend. He wanted Nellie to marry him. I congratulated her: “Congratulations, Nell—”

But it wasn’t congratulations she was after. “Don’t congratulate me, Masaccio,” she said. Nellie had been calling me Masaccio since our first date some three or four odd years ago. “Masaccio, are you there?” I was. “Well, don’t congratulate me. I said *no*, Masaccio. I don’t love him.”

“That never stopped anyone,” I told her. “You’ll learn to love him. You’re getting old, Nell.” She was thirty.

There was a brief pause, and then she began to cry. I didn’t know how to console her. I had learned that there was no way to console Nell when she went on a crying jag. She was inconsolable. “Now, now, Nell, it isn’t all that bad. What do you want?”

“I don’t know, Masaccio. I don’t know.” I couldn’t blame her. No one knew what he or she wanted, and those that said they did were lying to themselves. There was nothing I could say, so I invited Nellie to breakfast, and I was relieved when she said no.

“No, Masaccio. No. Thanks, but I can’t eat breakfast with you. You eat too much. It’d make me awful sick.”

“Suit yourself, Nell. Talk to you later then.” She was still sniffing into the mouthpiece when I hung up.

A moment later, the phone rang. I picked up the receiver and listened. “Okay, I’ll go to breakfast. Where?”

I met Nellie at the Nigel Park Diner. I chose the Nigel because they had good eggs and started serving early. “You aren’t going to eat a lot, are you Masaccio?”

“You know I’m Cuban, right?” I said, “That’s Italian—”

“Because if you *are*, Masaccio, I think I’ll throw up,” she said.

“You didn’t answer my question. Why do you call me Masaccio?”

Talking to her menu, “What should I order, a croissant or a bagel?”

“The bagel will kill you,” I said. “Order some protein. Have the steak and eggs. You look thin.”

“If I look like shit, then—”

“You woke me up at 5:00 ^{AM}, Nell.”

“I know what I’m going to have, how about you?”

“Yes, I knew before we got here,” I said. She was still talking to her menu. “I’m over here, Nellie.”

“Why did Hermes ask me to marry him, why?”

She had begun to call Herman ‘Hermes.’ I felt better. I wouldn’t ask her why. It seemed she needed to give men nicknames. They meant nothing, obviously.

“You know why I call Herman ‘Hermes?’”

“What? No, I don’t know why. You still haven’t told me why you call *me* Masaccio, and you need to tell me why.”

“He’s a mailman. Did I tell you that? Yep, he’s a mailman—a civil servant. But he doesn’t look like one. He looks more like a cross between an admiral and a cur—shaved head, all that.”

“You need your head checked, Nell. You could marry anybody. Just say no. You need to say no to Hermes. He doesn’t sound pretty,” I said.

↓

THE PROPOSAL

Hermes proposed.

She accepted.

It came to naught, ended badly.

She went home,

Slept in her old bed.

She taught.
 This filled her days.
 She glided from the classroom to the bar,
 And from the bar to a stranger's car.
 She met a chemist with a good salary.
 This would be her last relationship.
 All of her works were good works.
 When she prayed, God listened.
 She took late-night walks
 While Orchard Park slept.
 She dressed in the dark,
 Wandered the snowy streets,
 Past the Nigel Park Diner,
 Past Buster's Record Shop,
 To a trampled path to Belle Grove—
 A wraith stepping through the cored-out night—
 She stood on the docks,
 And whipped by the wind,
 Leapt from jagged rock to jagged rock,
 Chips of ice in her hair.
 She was seen crouching on a levy at Broening Park.
 She waited for the black sky to crack,
 For daylight to sift through.
 Her eyes grew wind-seared,
 Her face ashen,
 Hooded and engraved by winter's chisels.
 Night surrendered to day;
 Wan light leapt from crest to crest,
 Settled on her face
 And in the crevices burrowed there by ice.

The late-night walks ended.
 She stayed in bed.

× **012000MD**

ESTEBAN - *CONQUESTS, III*

I met Lucia in a bar on Light Street. She was an awful thing. I think she went home with me because I told her she had potential. I

didn't know what I meant by that, but I prayed she thought I did. Anyway, we walked home together, potholed street after potholed street, ducking beneath underpasses, and climbing the three flights to my apartment. I took her coat and as she followed me into the living room, she kicked off her shoes, wiggled out of her tube-dress, nose-dived into the sofa, passed out. I decided to sit opposite her in my desk chair in order to watch her. But I fell asleep. When I woke, it was to the sound of frying eggs. Lucia was in the kitchen, dancing to General Public's "Tenderness," singing into the handle of a spatula. She was wearing my winter jacket with the fur collar and a pair of wooden clogs that Mia had forgotten. Last I knew, the clogs were behind the hallway register, so I found it strange that Lucia was wearing them.

"Listen, I don't go home with guys usually," she called from the kitchen, shouting over the radio.

"I don't either," I said, rubbing my eyes.

"This is a rat-hole," she said.

"Thanks." I went into the bathroom in order to squirt some toothpaste into my mouth, but when I reached for the tube, it wasn't in its usual place.

"Lookin' for the toothpaste? It's in the kitchen. I used it earlier." Lucia was standing in the bathroom doorway. Looking into the mirror I could see her eyes and forehead over my shoulder. She arched an eyebrow and asked if I was hungry. I told her I wasn't but that I'd watch her eat.

"You're too thin. You need to eat," she said, walking toward the kitchen.

"I don't like food. I can't taste it," I lied.

"You can't taste food? You'll be able to taste my eggs!" I looked at the pile of charred scrambled eggs on the table. "The toast's almost done." Across the room there was a plume of black smoke coming from the toaster. "Light or medium?" she asked, bending over to wipe up some spilled egg.

"What?"

"Like your toast light or medium? I like mine dark, real dark, almost burnt. Anyway, why'd you ask me to come over last night? Sorry I passed out. I was real tired. I work something like sixty hours a week. Saturday's my night off. We could go out tonight."

"Possibly," I said.

“Well I think we should. Do you really read all of these books?”
Then she started to sing the last stanza of “True.”

*I bought a ticket to the world
But now I've come back again
Why do I find it hard to write the next line?
When I want the truth to be said...*

“Okay, I’ll have some eggs.”

“What?”

“The eggs—I’ll *have* eggs!” I shouted over the sound of Cookie Anderson, the morning DJ.

“Like I said, I don’t go home with guys, really. You just were somehow okay, and I was dead tired, and if I said no, it would’ve meant riding the train all the way back to Plum Creek. So I’m not like a do-anything kind of girl, I’m nice and paint and everything and work sixty hours a week.”

“Could you pass me the catsup?”

“What do you usually do on Saturdays?”

“On Saturdays, not much of anything, but if it’s sunny I’ll watch the planes land at BWI. We could do that if you want, unless you’re working, like you said, sixty hours a week.”

“Not today. Harry’s wife is having some kind of tumor scraped from the back of her kneecap—”

“Harry?”

“My boss,” she said, scraping the last of her egg from the plate with a fork.

“And you do *what* exactly?” I asked her, pushing my eggs around the plate.

“Secretary stuff mostly. You really can’t taste anything?”

“Are you done?” I asked her, taking the dirty dishes to the sink. If you’re staying I have shorts that’ll fit you. You’re going to have to wear the clogs though. I don’t have anything else, and you can’t wear those heels from last night.”

“I’m staying. I’ll wear them, sure, no problem. Thanks for breakfast.”

“You made it,” I answered and went into the bathroom to wet my hair and shave.

× 012100MD

THE COW

My body had been cast in lead.
 I lay in a rock-hard casement, a sepulcher.
 I did not breathe, or feel.
 My heart did not beat.
 My body was immobilized,
 My hands glued to my thighs, my chest rigid.
 I imagined something turning in my cells,
 Rolling over, rotating, like the needle of a compass.
 I tried to subtract my consciousness from my body.
 A lug-heavy weight pressed against my naked will.
 A shape began to ripple in the murk.
 A semblance of understanding began to gurgle and spit,
 Bubble and foam.
 A horn pierced the shapeless hardness.
 It burrowed into the stubborn lead
 And was joined by another pointed horn.
 Wet smoldering eyes and a skull like a bludgeon,
 Shoulders as wide as a mountain,
 A spine with thick black rails
 On which rumbled an iron horse bulging with steam—
 An impulse freewheeling upward from the milk-fat loins
 Dangling from bloody chains:
 It was a *Cow*—
 A steer with flared nostrils and crystals for teeth;
 The meat that I ate.
 It rose from the ashes in my intestines,
 Left a musky dew in my armpits and saliva in my eyes—
 The cow.

× 012200MD

ESTEBAN - *CONQUESTS, III, CONT'D.*

"I've never been in a plane."

"What do you mean? Everyone's been in a plane."

"Not me," Lucia said, ducking as a 747 roared overhead, "But I had a dream about flying once. My aunt was there, and my step-brother Richard, but everyone calls him Dick. Dick had a cold in the dream and was blowing his nose. I remember that. I don't think the plane ever left the ground."

"No?" I asked.

"No. I remember a rumbling sound and the stewardess demonstrating how to wear an oxygen mask, and another stewardess making sure everyone had their seatbelts hooked, but I've seen all of that stuff on TV. I'd like to fly though. Dick flies all the time."

"Richard?"

"Right, step-brother, yep, but not me, not yet, so if you want to, *and I don't know if you want to*, we could go out tonight and you could meet my friend Charley when she gets off. She's a dancer at 1520. Says she's met somebody. We could all go out together."

× 012300MD

Outside, the streets dotted with happy-hour crowds and the gutters piled with slush, Duff jogged up the street to the Cubbyhole. Aubrey sat in the window twirling an olive on the end of a toothpick. He hovered in front of the window until she noticed him then stepped in from the cold, hanging his jacket, passing under a low partition festooned with plastic holly. Aubrey didn't look up when he sat. Instead she surveyed the thick patches of people standing at the bar and under oversized TVs.

"You've eaten?" he asked.

Turning to him, "You look surprised."

"We were going to eat together."

"We were, but that was how long ago?" Aubrey began to stand.

"Don't go," he said, grabbing her wrist.

"You're an hour late. You really expect me to wait for you?"

"What's an hour, didn't you enjoy yourself?"

“No, don’t get up, I’m going.”

“But you waited this long.”

“I wanted the satisfaction of leaving you.”

Friend Lee Pickup, a sartorially-dressed administrator from the Woodlawn School for Boys, sallied over from the bar, swinging and spilling rum on his sleeves. “David Duff, you old fucker, imagine meeting you here. Who’s this? Come lady, sit down, that’s it, no, no, right there. Let me take your coat. Good!” He pushed Aubrey back into her chair. “No, don’t get up, I’ll get another chair.” From a nearby table he stole one, dragged it over. “You’re sure pretty, and *you*,” turning to me, “is as handsome as ever. How did you meet this guy?” he asked Aubrey, gripping her panty-hoed knee. She jumped and began to get up again, but Friend forced her back into the chair. “What’s the hurry, for God’s sake? You know the trouble a guy’s got to go through to see this chap?” he asked his rum, referring to me. “Fuckin lot of trouble—a whole fuckin lot!”

“I have to—”

“Just call me Friend, honey. F-R-I-E-N-D, *friend*, and sit the fuck down, already. You’d think you were in some kind of hurry.”

“Duff!” she pleaded, “I am *leaving*!”

“No one’s going anywhere,” howled Pickup, “The party’s just begun. Doll, you know who this man *is*? You don’t, do you? Think he’s just another cad? He ain’t. You met his son, Brian Todd? Course you haven’t.”

A waitress floated over and made the mistake of leaning over Friend’s shoulder to take his empty glass. He grabbed her wrist, wringing it, and she let out a yelp. “Don’t even think about it, honey. Does it look empty to you?” It *was* empty. “I’ll tell you when it’s empty,” then he beamed into her face, revealing a perfect set of teeth, his mouth round and insatiable, like a porcelain sink. She pivoted away from him, nauseated.

Aubrey’s eyes, black and prone, were varnished with uneasiness. They were like big, turn of the century window panes with a host of bubbles and imperfections, subject to gravity, running down slowly, growing thin in the corners and at their zeniths, where ice formed, as on a polar ice cap. If Duff could help it, he’d concentrate on the bridge of her nose or on her mouth, but never on her eyes. Anything but the eyes.

“Old man!” shouted Friend, slapping Duff on the shoulder. “The kid talks about you incessantly,” he lied. Turning to Aubrey, “Good

little fucker, that micro-Duff! His mother comes around two or three times a week. Wouldn't believe the dirt she's got on this guy," pointing at Duff. "Calls him the *Tyrannical-Ex*, believe that?" Pickup let out a guffaw that shook the bar. Aubrey shot Duff a look that might have meant anything. Clearly she was antsy, but afraid to get up again. Suddenly he wanted to deliver her a swift kick under the table—a bruising kick. He didn't know why. He only knew that it would feel good. Duff wanted to see Aubrey cry. Pickup was a bad influence.

"There was a nasty outbreak at Woodlawn this morning. One of the kids had a queer rash on his neck—wrapped all the way around, damn it! The teachers were scared. His name was James Grey. Before the nurses could get a hold of the prick, some of the boys dragged him into a stall, dunked the poor fucker's head into the john, near drowned him. He left the place on a stretcher. Talk about chaos! It was like the god damned Red Death. There was a line a hallway long to get to the sinks. I was washing my own hands six or seven times an hour. Imagine a kid bringing a disease into the place like that," Friend rubbed his eyes, "You've never seen anything like it!"

Aubrey took advantage of the moment, sprung from her chair and melted into the crowd by the bar. Friend caught a whiff of her perfume as she swept by and leapt from his chair, whipping around in circles until he spotted her slinking through the cluster of people, her head bobbing like a buoy, tunneling for the back door. "My holy God, Duff, she's getting away!" But he didn't chase her. Instead he remained stock still where he stood, his eyes a little glazed, his hands balling into fists. "You know what the ring around the kid's collar was? I was packing up, ready for happy hour, and a counselor calls me. Know what she says?"

Duff was staring into the cluster of people too, squinting after Aubrey's black shock of hair knitting its way to the door. "What'd she say?"

"She says the little prick tried to hang himself. Some fuckin' *rash*, huh? Tonight he does himself with a bed sheet, strangles himself. A plague, man. He brought it into *my* school!"

All of a sudden, as though from some deep sleep, David Duff was startled awake. He didn't know if it had been Pickup's story or if the Chinese Junk was corroding his veins, but he was awake—too

awake, maybe. He felt like a hanged-man, waking in mid-fall, waking too late. “I’m sorry, Friend. I’m really sorry,” he said weakly. “Me, too,” Friend replied. He went back to the bar.

× **012400MD**

THE MARKETABLE SINNERS

We, the crooked,
 We will have our day;
 When we are pressed and aged
 And drunk—
 The taste we leave in your mouths,
 Our illimitable legacy.
 We are the marketable sinners.

× **012500MD**

THE BEGGARMEN

You were begging for a new voice
 To rent a hole in the wall in your yards;
 To overturn your plastic pools and grills;
 To wake you at dawn and rustle you from your torpor;
 To be some constant winter maid,
 Sweeping you from your life.

× 012600MD

“*Ego sum lux.*”

—God

POST-WORLD WAR II STEGANOGRAPHY: ROY STRAND (1971-1970)²¹

Roy Strand's *Ascension at Nansen* (1947-1949)²² is a singular and exquisite example of steganography in art. It is the reflection of one man's obsession with detail, and the haunting truths that such an obsession may reveal, by virtue of the blood, sweat and tears that such an undertaking requires. It is a work that is the sum of innumerable details. That is, parts, valid in their own right, as well as when reviewed as though they were components in an assemblage, as indeed they are.

The *Ascension at Nansen* is a pivotal event in the New Lunar Ideogora or 'Lunagora' and sometimes regarded as the piece de resistance of the amendment to the Old Lunar Ideogora, or 'Eldergora' and one that has been reproduced by various artists in various mediums for half a century. But Strand's approach, with ghastly detail, supersaturated colors and pretensions to profundity, is unique. And it is not simply the detail that is admirable, but the obvious affection with which the detail was executed; the pure deliberation and mad intention.

In order to tackle the *Ascension at Nansen*, it may be practical to survey the piece from the foreground, through the middle ground, and finally proceed beyond the central figural elements upwards from the floor of the nave and into loftier regions (i.e. the clerestory windows of The Temple of Nansen). The floor-space consists of an obscured and stylized depiction of the Zodiac. This is interesting in relation to several elements, both explicit and implicit in the *Ascension at Nansen*. The Zodiac would not only refer to the dates of the *Ascension* itself and the supposed date on which the resurrected Baldr would be delivered into the world of men. But it would additionally refer to the corporeal world in general—the world that

²¹ AJITA, A NOVELLA, 196

²² FRANK AND LAURA LE CROIX COLLECTION, EGGLESTON MANOR, BELLE GROVE, MD

may be perceived directly; the world on which man or angel may tread, or on which he would tread without regret. It is apt, then, that the depiction of the Zodiac should be manifest on the floor as well as in the immediate foreground of the image, as it would indirectly denote worldliness and would implicate the viewer in that worldliness as well. However, the floor is not expressly consumed by the Zodiac, for within the borders that it would create is a rudimentary depiction of the pursuit of Sól by Sköll.

Atop the floor in the immediate foreground is a footstool. The footstool in Post-World War II steganographic artwork, as it does here, has been described as an intentional representation of one of Máni's declarations from on high to men on the Moon, or as a corporeal manifestation of the Ideogoras as filtered/channeled through said figure. More clearly, the footstool has been shown to represent the pseudo-corporeal presence of the 'Holy Spirit' (Read: Baldr) on the Moon ("Heaven is my throne, the Moon is my footstool."). The cushion of said stool is also of utmost interest. It is tangible, plush, blushing as though it were a feverish cheek. But what is interesting is Strand's intentional use of the fleur-de-lis pattern and herein it serves a double function. Firstly, it suggests the purity of Járnsaxa, Máni's consort, as well as enables the viewer to follow a natural course from the foreground into the interior of the painting, where the stool meets a vase that holds seven *belle di nottes* (*moonflowers*). But before we abandon the stool it is also of value to note the trefoil design with which the fleur-de-lis patterns are coupled. These were likely intentionally incorporated in an effort to suggest the idea of the Troika (Sól, Máni and Járnsaxa) that is being consummated in the image to which they belong.

Traditionally the *belle di nottes* are attributed to Járnsaxa's unquestionable purity and the seven *belle di nottes* correspond effectively with the seven respective rays of light that are emitted from one of the clerestory windows above the north transept in The Temple of Nansen, which are understood as the manifestation of Máni's word on the Moon. But in the vase are an assemblage of seven opened and two tightly closed *belle di notes*, and the two as yet unopened *belle di nottes* remain a cause for speculation—they are ominous without being forbidding, perhaps by virtue of their direct association with the already unfurled *belle di nottes*. As *belle di nottes* bloom from a seemingly lifeless bulb it is valid to say that Strand's assemblage bear a compound meaning. That is, much as

the *moonflower* blooms from the bulb, so will Baldr from death. It is appropriate, then, that the *belle di notte* represents the reincarnation. Finally, the vase, which is concealed by the footstool, much as Járnsaxa is partly concealed by a voluminous gown, may also represent the womb that would bear the reincarnation of Baldr.

From the vase of *belle di notte* one's eyes shift to an opened illuminated manuscript, with small and devilishly intricate designs heading passages. In the binding has been stowed what is presumably a gilded or burnished bookmark with a cluster-of-pearls cap. The pearls are of particular note in relation to the passage from the New Lunar Ideogora which reads:

*There formed from that urn,
As pearls from an oyster,
A flurry of stars.
A cry of anguish,
And Baldr was quickly born,
Reincarnate,
Brother of Váli.*

The Kingdom of Heaven, according to Strand, is at hand at the time of the *Ascension at Nansen*. Járnsaxa is placed before the manuscript in her customary blue (purity, sanctity) bodice and cloak. Her largesse emphasizes her significance and presence. And in comparison to Sigrún, her be-winged visitor, Járnsaxa's dress is austere, with a simple waistband. Her gestures—hands upheld in a demure sign of resignation, head pitched down and to the right slightly, as though suddenly it were difficult for her to support—complement the gestures of the valkyrie attendee, whom has imparted to her virginal charge the momentous event that is about to occur—an Immaculate Conception. Sigrún, who holds a short, crystal scepter—which together with the crown atop her head symbolizes God (Read: Máni, or Odin by proxy)-ordained authority—gestures upwards with her right hand at the seven respective beams of light. What is of supreme importance in relation to the beams, the central of which is accompanied by a disk²³ that descends—trajectory-like—toward Járnsaxa's head, is the fact that there are, indeed, seven beams, each of which, when perceived

²³ REFERRED TO AS THE "CHAPEL BELL" IN THE NEW LUNAR IDEOGORA

head-on as a particle would describe a tetrahedron—one point for every face and vertex; a composite of Platonic solids.

Unlike Járnsaxa, Sigrún has been depicted in luscious reds (symbol of royalty). On her breast rests a giant blue jewel, and along the fringe of her cloak ride several more which cascade downward towards the patterns inherent in the floor, and especially consistent with the quadratic borders composed of the Zodiac and various trefoil-shaped leaves. Also of supreme interest are Sigrún's wings that share attributes of two inherently different things: rainbows and peacocks. The rainbow serves as a symbol of Máni's faithfulness, and as a seal of his supposed fidelity to the Moon. The rainbow figures heavily into the Lunar Ideogora in relation to the Ideogoric Deluge or Ragnarök. The wings also resemble a peacock's frill. In Lunar Ideogoric symbolism it is generally agreed that the peacock signifies immortality.

The architecture of Strand's *Ascension at Nansen* abounds with symbolism as well. There is virtually nothing that does not operate as symbol, signifier or semagram. Those architectural elements that are visible in the work occur in clusters of three or four: Columns are organized in clusters of three or four, windows are organized in clusters of three and four and even roof beams are organized after a similar fashion. It is significant that some items occur in groups of four, as this is a technique whereby Strand was able to allude to the four völvas (Heidi, Gróa, Thorbjörg and Huld), or to the elemental properties of the corporeal world—earth, air, fire, and water, while he utilized assemblages of threes to denote the Troika. Behind the Járnsaxa are three windows, the second of which functions as an aureole about the Járnsaxa's head. Taken together, the three windows are a clever analog for the Troika and the intrinsic light that the mystic wedding possesses.

On a level with the clerestory windows is another window. This one is stained-glass and represents the one God of the Old Lunar Ideogora, Mundilfari. In his hands he bears a tablet which reads, *Ego sum lux* or "I am the light." Beside him, as though Strand had intended them to resemble frescoes, are, presumably, the images of the four völvas—two with haloes and two without.

But the architectural detail with which I am most intrigued is the single doorway aloft the nave, recessed beyond a narrow hall and obstructed by a single column. This solitary doorway may be perceived to represent several things. It may be understood as a

symbol of Baldr: “Therefore,” Baldr said again, “I tell you the truth. I am as a portal to creeping stars” (Gróa 13:3). It may also be perceived as an invitation to prayer and interconnectedness with Baldr.

Strand’s *Ascension at Nansen* is a hotbed of symbols, signifiers and semagrams. Its meanings are many, its richness bona fide. It is maddeningly complex and may only truly be appreciated when perceived with a view to decoding the countless parts of which it is composed. Herein I have sought to decode a few of its many ‘parts,’ but have no pretensions to understanding the whole. Even after having spent several hours with the painting, I feel helpless. I am ashamed to say that I have looked, lingered, squinted and plundered the painting for meaning, but I remain dumbfounded, as it is not merely a stylized portrayal of an event, but also a reflection of the mindset of a man that possessed genius, it remains at once an infuriating and quixotic work. If ever there was a painting that might drive a man mad, this is it.

× **020100MD**

POST-WORLD WAR II STEGANOGRAPHY, CONT’D: ROY STRAND (1971-1970)

Looking and seeing are both valid acts of perception. Looking denotes perception on a temporal level, with an aim at cerebral cognizance. Our everyday perception is one determined by looking. As we look, objects appear to us as we expect them to. In another sense, objects fulfill our expectations of them, as we regard their appearance in reference to our past experiences. Motion is an action that relies in part upon looking, but not exclusively. Personal navigation can be achieved in absence of natural sight with the assistance of one or more of the other senses. In such a case where the eyes cease to perform their ordinary occupation, the senses of hearing, taste, touch, and smell become the primary means of looking.

Seeing, on the other hand, is another matter. When we are actively engaged in the act of seeing, we are not necessarily ‘looking’ any longer. Where looking takes place on a formidable, temporal level, seeing takes place on an atemporal one, occurring at a remove from the traditional mode of perception. Looking denotes a physical

form of perception. In contrast, seeing denotes spiritual vision, epiphany, or deep understanding. In other words, seeing is not a method of perception which obeys natural laws, or is executed by the eyes alone.

Again, looking is assisted in part by the memory, which aids with the contextualization of the light that is refracted on the retina. The memory acts as a conductor, assembling a combination of abstract images into a coherent whole. Thus, those images are rationalized and reorganized into understandable pictures. Looking, then, is a process. Unlike looking, seeing does not rely upon a given process. Rather, it is prompted, affected by the minutiae indiscernible through the act of looking. Seeing succeeds where looking fails. Where looking is premeditated, seeing is inspired, and occurs spontaneously. This is not to imply that the act of seeing is superior to the act of looking, as looking and seeing clearly function to accomplish different tasks.

The processes, looking and seeing, were a major preoccupation of artists of the Post-World War II Steganographic Scene in the US. In many instances, the struggle between the two acts of perception was evident in the artist's work (i.e., Roy Strand, Adolfo Suárez). Many artists strove to achieve a clear division between that form of sight afforded one through the manipulation of materials, and that sight afforded one through the act of spontaneous vision. The artist for whom these issues were a concern operated as an intermediary between the realms—the spiritual and the temporal, the encrypted and the plain. The battle waged by that artist who sought to cause his audience to surpass themselves, and consequently 'see,' was not fought in vain.

One such artist, who mastered the artistic depiction of the perceptions, looking and seeing, was Roy Strand, credited with the invention of Steganographic Painting. From his works, it can be deduced that Strand was a skilled craftsman, one who was aware of the allusions to the acts of looking and seeing that he could make through the manipulation of his materials. He was a master of atmospheric perspective, a practice wherewith objects in a painting are obscured, as though in a haze, in order to affect a sense of depth. Similarly, linear perspective, which signals a diminution in the scale of objects as they recede into the distance, was used equally as well by the former Ajitan.

Strand's *Chapel Bell*²⁴ (1956), uses subtle changes of light and color—tools of atmospheric perspective—in order to actualize a feeling of vastness. Those subtle changes impart to the painting a delicate luminosity and an overall softness that impels its audience to look closely, becoming moved by the transformative power that Strand's *Chapel Bell* evinces. It is clear that Strand accomplished his painterly feats with an unearthly refinement of the oil medium. Moreover, his painstaking attention to detail acts as the catalyst for the act of seeing.

Strand employed many devices which operate as liaisons between physical (encrypted) and spiritual (decrypted) sight. One such device, in addition to those mentioned above, is his use of color in the depiction of worldly and spiritual figures. In *The Temples of Nansen* (1963), Strand's use of color was instrumental in the full realization of the subject matter. For instance, on the work's outer surface, the figures performing the *Ascension at Nansen* are executed in grisaille, a saintly, sculptural gray, whereas the donors, depicted in niches below, are colored with flesh tones, causing the division between the spiritual and temporal, encrypted and decrypted, worlds to become explicit.

Strand's paintings are psychological puzzles. His subjects are depicted with microscopic precision and with an almost obsessive objectivity. But things are not always as they seem. His works require intense scrutiny, and only then does the detail betray the ecstatic vision which is sewn into the painting's faces with gossamer-thin intention.

Seeing is not an altogether rational experience. Sometimes it happens only after we close our eyes, as the impressions left by looking vanish. And sometimes, seeing happens in the process of looking. This form of perception characterized by simultaneity of looking and seeing, is a singular experience—the instances whereby which this unique perception is invoked are few. In the late fifties, Strand began to impart to his works a dream-like quality. In his *Dunstan Fields*²⁵ (1959), irrational imagery compounded with puzzling allusions to sanctity and sardony, the spiritual and the temporal, combine to invoke simultaneity of perception.

²⁴ FRANK AND LAURA LE CROIX COLLECTION, EGGLESTON MANOR, BELLE GROVE, MD

²⁵ FRANK AND LAURA LE CROIX COLLECTION, EGGLESTON MANOR, BELLE GROVE, MD

‘Looking’ at *Dunstan Fields*, the subject matter is unclear. It is a pall of dazzling, otherworldly creatures engaged in love-making and dancing, conversation and speculation. It is a mountain of overlapping images and messages, terrifying in their implications. It is uncertain whether this was Strand’s intention, but his painting has the effect of a strong narcotic which removes one from his or her traditional mode of perception, replacing it with a more exotic form of perception, one that we have already called ‘seeing.’

When ‘seen,’ Strand’s painting is reduced from its former ambiguity into a coherent aggregate; it assumes participatory elegance. Seeing, we tend to form a hitherto unwarranted identification with the cavorting figures in the field. We no longer condemn them, as we are more like them than we wanted to acknowledge, bounded as we were by an overbearing earth-bound rationale.

Strand was representative of the Early Orchard Park School of painting. However, the very notion of “steganographic consciousness” was a Soviet idea formed shortly after 1922. Steganographic consciousness implies a return to the precepts of social engineering. This meant a formidable conquest of the mind. Obeying the traditions and disciplines of social engineering, the artists of the Early Orchard Park School, like their counterparts in the Soviet Union, were the personification of corporeality in the arts.

Seeing and looking were still trying issues for the artists of the Early Orchard Park School. Their approaches to the questions of perception were brilliant, and the techniques with which they countered the problems that arose there from, equally as brilliant. One young Cuban-American, whose marvelous attainments earned him a singular fame, was Adolfo Suárez. Suárez was only 21 when he singlehandedly charted the new style of painting that would set the tone for later achievements by his contemporaries. His earliest dated work is a mural of 1941 called, *The Völuspá of Dina*.²⁶ In many respects, this mural is a testament to perspective. At once, we look, our eyes drawn to a point at the foot of the slain Baldr. Here, on a platform that supports two kneeling donors, all lines converge, forming an inverted apex of systematic perspective. Inside of a barrel-vaulted chamber stand Járnsaxa and Huld. They flank the

²⁶ FRANK AND LAURA LE CROIX COLLECTION, EGGLESTON MANOR, BELLE GROVE, MD

slain figure of Baldr, a poison dart in his chest. The chamber reveals Suárez's thorough knowledge of steganographic methodology developed by the cryptographer, Admiral Valentin Tyner, I. Máni the Father, looming large, supports the altar over which the slain Baldr is laid, garlanded with mistletoe.

It is here, with the depiction of God the Father (Máni or Odin by proxy), that Suárez defies the natural laws of perspective in order to preserve the time-honored traditions governing the Troika image. The composition was carefully planned to illustrate depth—the diminution of objects in space. However, the platform on which God the Father stands is stationed in the backmost portion of the vaulted chamber, while Baldr on the altar stands in the near foreground. How, then, if such a distance divides them, can the altar be supported in the arms of God the Father? This is the dilemma with which Suárez had to contend. It is also the dilemma which bridges the act of looking with the act of seeing. Suárez takes the liberty of firmly planting God the Father's feet on the distant platform while hyper-extending his body through space, that he may properly attend to his son in the foreground. This peculiar alteration of perspective triggers the act of seeing, as the facilities for looking are momentarily impaired by this irregularity. Spiritual sight assumes dominance where physical sight meets with its own limitations.

Needless to say, cryptographic artwork required extensive erudition on the part of the viewer in order for its meaning to be properly deciphered. It is no wonder that it did not become an overly popular movement, except among its chief patrons and defense intelligence agencies. And Strand *did* have many devotees and patrons, many of whom were of a purely mystical persuasion, and others of a less noble.

In the case of *Dunstan Fields*, looking alone will not suffice as a means of understanding. Seeing requires an extraneous knowledge on the part of the viewer. He must come to the painting equipped with erudition of his own. Given sufficient erudition, what was hitherto referred to as spiritual sight is replaced with intellectual sight. Both forms afford one with significant insights into a painting's subject matter. Both forms exceed the limitations imposed upon understanding by looking alone.

Looking and seeing are both valid forms of perception. Looking concerns the physicality of things. Seeing can occur on one of two

levels: a spiritual level and an intellectual level. Looking and seeing can also occur simultaneously, as I suggest with the Strand painting, *Dunstan Fields*. Alas, they are not mutually exclusive. In my opinion, looking is only worthwhile when conjoined with seeing.

× **020200MD**

GEORGE IRWIN: “CREEPING SYNCRETISM”

I think it can be safely assumed that it is in the nature of man to wonder and to be humbled by the awesome prospect of being: The typical Syncretic-Baldrism has extrapolated from the New and Old Lunar Ideogoras those aspects that may contribute most effectively to right-living. An example of such may include Baldr’s “Inn Nýi Siðr,” which also happens to be a cornerstone of the works of Hillel and Confucianism. This is an ethical teaching that may be conveyed simply and to great effect. In the West, the Baldrism has compartmentalized those aspects of the New and Old Lunar Ideogoras that are of practical value from those that are largely irrelevant in our comparatively enlightened age. In this light, the impact of Baldrism in the West may be perceived as benign.

Baldrism can be perceived as a method that describes the basic criteria for right-living, cognate to Greek ethos. On this level, Baldrism serves as an integral cultural cornerstone in the West, imparting to its adherents those values which will enable them to conduct themselves in a manner which visits the least harm on the most people. There are few leaders unaware of Baldrism’s ability to achieve this end.

In so far as Baldrism is able to impart these values and instill in its would-be adherents a sense of meaning and an epistemological foundation that seeks to convey values that aim to impart a sense of ethicality, there is much to be appreciated in Baldrism, regardless of its flavor.

The threat that is often perceived of Baldrism by many atheists is its efficient ability to polarize people of different faiths. But the question remains, is it Baldrism which polarizes differing faiths, or the presiding interpretations of those faiths which result in polarization? All men are concerned with meaning. The atheist consciously rejects theism or paganism as he feels there are better and more efficiently realizable methods with which knowledge of

the world can be gathered. The atheist's method is very often aligned with the scientific method, whereas the Baldrist would seek knowledge by a more explicitly spiritual method, which is seen to be at odds with science and its aims.

But on a fundamental level, atheists and Baldrists alike are concerned with meaning, with immortality, with the fate of the soul, with all of those questions that arrived at the dawn of consciousness. That we seek answers implies that we value life. The Baldrist values life and would celebrate this fact by praising and esteeming the life of Baldr; by performing rituals that simulate Baldr's pursuit of meaning. His gifts were light, beauty and love. Perhaps Baldr had tools at his disposal that were not standard-issue. If this is the case, men on earth would seek to pursue the path of righteousness that Baldr prescribed in an effort to secure those tools. It is even possible that many a Baldrist may come into possession of said tools; perhaps one day science will confirm this.

I wonder if it is wise to condemn the tools that man has at his disposal designed for the pursuit of meaning. Humankind needs meaning. Many atheists move off the reservation of faith because theirs is not a purely spiritual disposition; their disposition esteems a method that relies on matter and perceivable phenomena for insights into the meaning of life. This is a valid method, but it should not seek the invalidation of the spiritual method as its primary aim.

I am an atheist in so far as my own experiences, spiritual and otherwise, do not derive validation from the God of the Old Lunar Ideogora (God herein referred to as the *ineffable*: that which is omniscient or the immanent, not to be confused with Odin or Máni). I don't perceive God as a singular entity. It is important to emphasize that few Baldrists in the 21st century perceive God as a singular entity either. The historical Baldr was interested in conveying a method of living that would enable mankind to remain sensitive to its surroundings; to remain accepting, open-minded. You do not find the fire and brimstone inflections from the Eldergora in the New. And more and more, I am of the opinion that atheists should temper their debates with this same sense of acceptance and open-mindedness. It is natural for the atheist to be intolerant of the man that would exploit Baldrism for an end unrelated to spirituality and right-living. But by the same token, it seems atheism has been hijacked to serve the ends of an

unprecedented war on spirituality, rather than devoting its energies to applied science.

There is much about life that we do not understand. Both the Baldrist and atheist are keenly aware of this. And both the Baldrist and atheist would pursue those avenues that best enable them to enhance their understanding of the world. I don't find much in the modern interpretation of Baldrism that is intolerable. And given a short primer on atheism, I don't think the average Baldrist would be hostile to atheism. They are two different methods of perception, one no less capable than the other. Each must be respected, as each is able to bear fruit and contribute to the quality of life led on Earth and environs.

× **020500MD**

THE DRINKING SEASON

They called her Charlie, but I called her Charlene. We didn't keep secrets. It was a quaint bond, a 21st century bond, and more importantly, we liked each other.

We met on Truncheon Island. I'd had some neurological issues that were degrading my hearing, numbing my fingers, setting joints on fire and impairing my ability to spell. No one could diagnose it in the categorical sense, so I decided to take a vacation. I'd never really done that before: taken a vacation. I was doing a fare bit of wandering and poking around, drawing in the sand with sticks, climbing the rocky shoreline in sneakers, sleeping very little, drinking much. There was pain and fuzziness and poor coordination but nothing life-threatening.

Early one morning, feeling ravenous, looking for something open in the gray dusk, I ran into Charlene as she was coming out of a Wight Street apartment. Dressed in black, her face floated in the thick ocean smog. She smiled. I smiled back. And then she was gone, jogging to her car, a bag of groceries under her arm. That's how we met. I remember, but she doesn't.

A week later, the weather warmer, I was out early again, hung over, not as hungry as before. I was lugging Pat's cat through the foggy streets because that's what Pat wanted: *"He likes that. He'll whine all day if he hasn't had his tour of town."* So I volunteered and when I bumped into Charlene a second time, I had a tiger cat

bundled under my arm. The cat startled her and then her floating head zoomed in and kissed the tiger on its head. “Nice kitty,” she said.

“I’m going to drown it.”

“You bad man, you should be locked up. Come in and let your cat meet my cat.”

“What do you think, kitty—should we follow the nice lady? Maybe she’ll feed us.”

“I’ll feed the cat, not sure about the man—something odd about the man, but he’s got a nice enough face. Let’s take him up, kitty.” She grabbed the cat and bounded up the stairs.

It was a nice morning. She fixed Bloody Maries, asked perfunctory questions, then personal ones, sat in my lap. The cats eyed one another uneasily on the living room rug. We kissed until the Sun was propped on the windowsill overlooking town. I was reluctant to leave my new friend, but she had errands. I was welcome to stop in later, meaning after midnight. She never slept. Any time was fine. I left with the cat.

It was a Tuesday, the thing with Charlene. I spent the afternoon in Tubbs.’ Tubbs,’ a sea-wreck of a bar with cockeyed windows, warped clapboards and a twisted metal roof, sat on a jetty or a promontory or some such technical sea-term. Tubbs himself was a twisted little man with chips in his beard. He had wild ruby-colored eyes and ruddy hands with barnacled knuckles. I got snug in a booth by the window, drank Handsome Lager. I didn’t talk and Tubbs didn’t talk. I heard the lunch boats scrape their hulls below and seven crab men slopped in, plunked down and roared for an hour. They left. Tubbs was perched on a stool at the bar, stroking his burnsides. I drank and watched the water lap the shore, listened to the sea-breeze whistle in the eaves, until evening, when the edges of things were smudged and wild rye rustled in my ears.

I wanted to see Charlene, just not right away. I didn’t have the fortitude, moral or otherwise. I needed to get tight and lonely in an old-fashioned way so I could weave up her stairs, knock with surly confidence on her door. But that’s not how it happened. She came into the Hen House, in black, her hair down, eyes speckled with whiskey motes, sat on a stool beside me, ordered a Canadian Club and water.

“I like you.”

“I like you, too,” I replied. I meant it.

“Here’s the thing—we should date, we really should. Eat dinner together, talk, get cozy, maybe have sex. Not right away, but you know...but I’m on the road a lot, gone for a week at a time, sometimes more, *entertaining*. But I liked you right away like I liked Jim Rogers when I was twelve and he was sixteen. So, if you can hack it, I think there’s something to this.” She poked me with her index finger then poked herself between her breasts.

“I can hack it, if I can call you Charlene.”

“They call me Charlie, mostly. My daddy called me Charlene”

“So I’ll call you Charlene until I call you something else.”

“Fine, look, I gotta go. I’ll be back on Friday, late—come by and we’ll make dinner and you can tell me all about what you are.”

And that suited me, the whole arrangement. It made sense in a bleary way, Charlene did and I wondered if it would last long enough for pet-names. After all, it isn’t real without pet-names, as the old man always said.



Pat and Baer are my hosts on Truncheon. Baer’s got a small recording studio where he mixes and masters music for a small label in Baltimore. Pat’s a hair-dresser, or ‘designer,’ as she says and for that reason I won’t let her within a mile of my head. And they are recently childless, god bless their souls. Ted, 21, from whom they’d been estranged for the better part of his adolescence and adult life, OD’d on Phenobarbital in a girls’ dorm room on Fraternity Row in College Park. This was last spring. Baer whispered one night through a pint of Handsome that they didn’t get their son back until he died. “He sure came home, didn’t he? Home for good and we never talked, not like two grown men. Not like this.” But I think it was a relief, his death, as they don’t have to worry anymore—in-bed-but-not-sleeping worry. Goodbye, Ted.

Baer was a colleague first, mixing most of my early stuff, mastering it for free, giving it a quick once-over, mopping up the crackle and pop, letting me do whatever it was that I did with it, which wasn’t much. He had a cleaning lady named Mara that lurked the premises—a girl, really, not much more than 25 or so, Ukrainian. And she’d do a bit of cleaning like her job description promised, but mostly she’d listen to music with us, her feet on the soundboard, comment on the mixes, make suggestions. Soon she was Baer’s full-time assistant. She had Pat design her hair, crop the

bangs like a pin-up girl, and dye it black. She was a pale monster, terrified of the Sun. She took a black umbrella everywhere for those especially sunny days.



It is early in May, a year ago, and I wake up without fingers—they are there, I can move them, but no feeling—just no-feeling fingers. It was startling but I didn't give it much thought. I was accustomed to odd all kinds. But a week or so passed and my ears which were always bad became markedly worse and then spelling suddenly became an enterprise. That's right, spelling. I thought it would be quaint to go to a family doctor, get some personal medical advice, but she ended up being a regular GP at Atlantic General. "So it's a gimmick."

"What's a gimmick?" she asked, jotting something in a ledger with her left claw.

"This 'family practice' business. It's not like you tote a black bag and stethoscope around the neighborhood."

"It's a gimmick," she said, probably to appease me. "And I don't know what it is, what you've got—plaque somewhere, maybe, probably, I don't know. We'll need to do more tests. I think it's neurological."

"Is it nerves?" I asked

"No, neurological and I'm not out to scare you, but some of these symptoms are early indications of Parkinson's, and so we keep that in mind when we run tests. Not that it is."

She was a sweetie, Doctor Strand. Anyway, it wasn't Parkinson's. Electrical activity in my brain was a little unusual, but not in a categorical way, as they say. But my fingertips were numb and I was having the damndest time scooting over the piano keys without a great deal of deliberation. So that's that. I stopped writing and recording music. It seemed convenient.

Charlene had problems, too. She had been suffering low-grade fevers regularly since childhood. She worried that it had softened her up somehow, limited her intellectual capacity, but I was doubtful of that. She was bright as the dickens, sparkly, but definitely warm to-the-touch, warmer than most. "I run a little hot," she said.

Indeed.



She got back on Friday. I was in the Hen House drinking lunch when she got out of a cab and jogged up the stairs to her apartment. I watched her open the curtains from where I sat. She looked down and smiled. And then she was gone, probably to the bathroom.

We had dinner at 1:00 ^{AM}. She cooked: lasagna, crab cakes, bread and butter, beer.

“You think it’s real, your disorder or maybe your imagination, like a secret wish?” she asked.

“Could be, I wanted to do nothing, positively nothing. I have said everything I wanted to say with music. I can’t hear worth beans anymore. Maybe I needed a concrete reason to give up. It’s a possibility. A distinct one.”

“So you’re on Truncheon Island.”

“It’s not really an island anymore—the bridge took care of that.”

She pushed what was left of the lasagna around on her plate. “People need excuses. You build a bridge like that, you don’t have to swim in the cold water. You can run away in a car real fast.”

We walked off dinner on the promenade, our shoes clacking on warped boards. She took my arm, rested her head on my shoulder. “It’s better this way, just going for it, you know, finding someone, holding them, saying, *I really want you. Someday I’m even going to love you.*”

“Sure.”

“You get to an age when that makes sense.”

I woke up early. Charlene’s cat was curled in a ball in the spot where she had been. The cat was peering through a slatted eye, daring me to bother her. “I won’t,” I whispered.

Charlene was in the living room, on the couch, a laptop resting on her knees. “A couple more emails and we can take a shower, get some coffee and see the sights. I’m supposed to take a friend’s kid to Assateague.”

I stretched, stood on the balls of my feet and said that sounded like a good idea. “I thought you’d turned into a cat.”

Without looking up, the screen reflected in her glasses, “She’ll do that. She gets jealous of me. Imagine that. Wait till it gets cold. She might kick us both out of bed.”

So Charlene was serious. One day, she'd love me. She'd say, '*I used to like you, now I really love you.*' I'd believe it and feeling would return to my fingers.

Little Rowan was her name, Jackie's daughter. Jackie was visiting Bill who was locked up in Hagerstown for grand theft auto. "She thinks it's genetic, Jackie does—the stealing. She found a box of her lipsticks and perfume under Rowan's bed. I think she admires her momma. Isn't she a darling?" Rowan was running up ahead, squatting in the grass, picking flowers and holding them up to the sky. "I can't have them. I really wanted to once, but I wasn't put together properly. If things were different and I wasn't what I was and you were a banker or something you're not, I'd ask you to give me a baby. And we'd be that couple that drives a station wagon up Mt. Washington with a kid drooling in the car seat."

I took a swig of Handsome, swished it around in my mouth, swallowed. I pulled Charlene close with the front of her pink sweater and kissed her on the lips.

Rowan was a firecracker. Charlene had her for the night and I stayed until the bar across the street went murder black. We tucked the kid in on the couch and Charlene walked me to the door. "I'm gone until Tuesday. Just a short stint in Baltimore and then I'll be home, okay?" I kissed her, smelled the skin around her ear and left.



Charlene: What's in a name? I thought about all the things we didn't say to one another, or wouldn't. We talked like old lovers. We didn't talk about her life away from Truncheon, or about mine, or where we'd been, or why we were giving ourselves to each other without a second thought. I came to Truncheon without any intention of leaving. I came to scramble among the rocks for a season or several like the crabs and to drink. Then maybe go the way of Baer's Ted—some Phenobarbital and brine. Or maybe I'd think of something a little less prosaic, or maybe it'd just be an accident—step out of the Hen House, stumble off the curb. Maybe Charlene knew this, or sensed it. Maybe she recognized the whiskey motes in my eyes.

The following Tuesday, I stopped into the Hen House for a light lunch. Sax pushed an envelope across the bar. It wasn't addressed.

"She dropped this off this morning, said to give it to you. See how I steamed it open, closed it back up neat?"

“Thanks, that’s handiwork.”

Russell,

I had to come in late last night and pick up some things. I'm going back to Baltimore for I'm not sure how long. Don't be mad. I know you won't be. I hope you stay.

Charlene

“A whiskey,” I said, ripping the note in half.

Three weeks later I was playing piano nights at John Semple’s Bar. There’d been no word from Charlene and I hadn’t expected it. On a muggy night in July, little Rowan and her mother showed up. Rowan ran to the piano. I picked her up, set her on the edge. “Play me a song, Mister.”

“Rowan and I are going to her grandmother’s for awhile. Charlene wanted to know if you’d look in on her cat. She says the cat’s got a crush on you.”

“How is she?” I asked.

“You know Charlene.”

I knew. There was nothing to say. “Let me play you a tune, kid.”



August 1st was Baer’s 45th birthday. Pat organized a shindig and asked me to entertain. I was playing nights at Semple’s, now birthday parties. I guess I hadn’t given up music. We set a piano out on the back lawn under a weed tree. Charlene’s cat stretched out on the piano’s hood like a centerfold model, kept time with her tail. I did clumsy barroom stuff, honky-tonk and jazz numbers. Next to the cat, folded in half, was a copy of Monday’s Baltimore Sun. If I unfolded it, flipped to section D, page 3—*wedding announcements*—I would reread a headline in the lower right-hand corner: For Love or Money: *Heir*²⁷ *Marries Escort*—but I wouldn’t, not again, not tonight.

²⁷ INK, BORN JOHN SPRAGUE (ALSO, ÆSOP & “THE MIRAGE”)

Tonight I'd play the piano and enjoy it. The feeling was returning to my fingers.

× **020900MD**

"The propagandist is in love with a handful of words. One of them is 'iconoclasm.'"

—David Duff

Dear George,

Cipher: Louisville

Subject: David Duff's, "The Chroniker"

In "The Chroniker," Duff employs a structure that is at once instructional, and serves the purpose of clarification, by tracing the origin of his subject to a specific time and place, then referring to that established temporal flag throughout his argument. In this way he achieves a degree of consistency that is also indebted to his organic style in which each successive thought is a natural outgrowth of the last. His argument has the effect of sustaining the reader's curiosity, challenging him at every turn, as well as encouraging criticism. Duff's essay has the character of an elaborate daydream that has run riot, but never for an instant does his argument grow beyond the garden walls. There is an order inherent in Duff's work by which he abides religiously. The numbered sections are testimony to this notion. Numbered sections appear in his work as literary governors just as his train of thought is at risk of becoming nonnegotiable.

-Russell

× **021100MD**

“Some say language is a prison, others a pedestal. William Blake considered the body a prison. So did Descartes. Someone else has had the temerity to call fashion a prison. What a laugh. There is only one prison.”

—George Irwin

THE ATLAN INTERNMENT CAMPS (2015-2019)

During the preliminary phases of World War III, 120,000,000 men, women, and children, two-thirds of whom were American citizens, were interred to detention camps by the U.S. Government. There, many would spend the duration of the war without the freedoms guaranteed them by the 21st Century Charter of the United States. Those freedoms were grossly violated, and the result was human suffering on an appalling scale.

On February 19th, 2015, Executive Order 33500 was issued by President James McGovern Findlay. In short, this order granted the United States Military with the authority to step between American citizens and the rights which were deservedly theirs. Many of the Americans taken unlawfully prisoner were naturalized Atlans. They were, in other words, individuals for whom the privileges and immunities boasted by the 21st Century Charter should have been upheld, but were not.

35,000,000 Americans immigrated to Atlantica between the years 2012 and 2015. These Americans comprised an immigrant culture called the Atlans. The Atlans called the children born to them in their new lands, Natlans, or New Atlans. In Atlantica, where they accounted for nearly 40 percent of the population in 2015, the Atlans led industrious lives, working as contract laborers, farmers, fisherman, barbers, tailors, and shopkeepers, among other trades. A subsequent community matured, including Atlan schools, churches, and organizations.

In 2014, a law in Atlantica was passed that prohibited the ownership of land from people ineligible for citizenship (Read: Atlans). But in spite of the outright racism of which they were the targets, Natlan-Americans, the children of ineligible immigrants, established communities of their own, building schools and businesses.

When war finally broke out between the U.S. and China, the Natlan generation, despite their accomplishments as loyal American citizens, were coaxed from their homes and communities, and placed in concentration camps where they would not illicit a sense of fear from the dominant culture, many of whom suspected Atlan-Americans of dissent, espionage, and sabotage.

In the Atlan Internment Camps, as they were commonly known, 120,000,000 men, women, and children were detained. Again, two-thirds of these individuals were American citizens by birth. They lived behind barbed wire and were protected by armed guards. Young people who were willing to work as field laborers were released from the militarized zones, but this was not often. Most remained within the confines of the camps, eating in mess halls and living in barracks. Nevertheless, attempts were made to make life on the inside as pleasant as that without. Associations and churches, dances and athletic competitions were concessions made to the detainees as examples of such attempts.

It is additionally important to note that upwards of 900,000 Atlan-Americans served with the U.S. military during World War III. They fought in what were known as the 319th and 322nd battalions. On December 17, 2019, Public Proclamation number two ended the incarceration of American resident aliens and American citizens. Each individual, upon their release, was issued a small line of credit and a ticket for transportation. As many did not any longer have homes to which they could return, they utilized temporary shelters provided by the federal government. Still, discrimination, then as now, continued. As many communities shunned them as welcomed them. However, attempts by federal and local governments at financial restitution were made, and restrictions on land ownership, education, immigration, and citizenship were dissolved. A formal apology was not made on behalf of the wronged Atlan-American citizens until 2021 by President Thomas McRobbie Raeburn.

× **022900MD**

“Peace-of-mind, to me, is being comfortable in a lie. That, or getting caught telling the truth.”

—David Duff

“If there is entertainment-value in facts, nobody told me. This is why the censor has currency—he is all that stands between facts and their antidote: sensationalism.”

—George Irwin

“A journalism of filtered assertion makes the comingling of fact and spin, argument and innuendo, simpler and leaves a population receptive to manipulation. Journalism is not a forum for debate and it does not generate enthusiasm unless it is built on a foundation of disinformation.”

—John Sprague (a.k.a., InK; a.k.a., Æsop)

MEMETIC ANGST

Journalism should serve the interests of its audience. It should be unbiased—a *pure* medium for ideas and facts. It should address its audience in a language that does not compromise the integrity of words and the meaning/s they were intended to convey. But this flavor of journalism is rare. In their February 28th Orchard Park Gazette article “Mainstream Deceit,” Laura Le Croix²⁸ and Cass Wilder discuss the sensationalism which has taken precedence in journalism, replacing verification with assertion. They affirm that “unvarnished truth should be the journalist’s aim.” If a story cannot be verified beyond the shadow of a doubt, then it should not be run, otherwise, it runs the risk of misinforming the public. But the public is aware of the inefficacies of the news. Therefore, as journalism becomes a hot-house for inanities, public interest wanes.

“There was a time,” comment Le Croix and Wilder, “When journalism abided by an inalienable code of conduct. If there were discrepancies in the press, they were negligible.” Granted, the arguments were carefully censored, and those positions that were classified remained classified, but the issues that *did* meet the press were factual. Today, word-of-mouth constitutes a close examination of an issue. Reporters have few qualms about printing information that is not airtight. This is unsatisfactory. What warrants this practice?

²⁸ WIFE OF THE LATE FRANK LE CROIX (1971-1965), CELEBRATED AJITAN

Why have facts fallen out of favor with journalists? Are facts less absorbing than scandal? Journalism, no longer a source of staunch data, has lost its luster; it is no longer celebrated for its attention to detail; it has lost its perspective. “Journalism,” say Le Croix and Wilder, “Is chiefly concerned with disinformation.”

Journalists strove to influence the course of events by compromising the integrity of their business during the recent impeachment trial. As the trial drew to a close, journalists hopped on the *off-the-record* sexual assault allegations against President James McGovern Findlay by Tracy Byrd, a space-travel agent from Plum Creek. In time for the verdict, Byrd decided to go public. Because her assertions against Findlay were difficult to corroborate, as the assault occurred in 1989, her story was not aired in time for the historic verdict. The Orchard Park Network, to whom the story had been entrusted, froze the piece until it had been properly analyzed, in spite of pressure from outside sources that wanted the story run while it was ‘hot;’ the efficacy of the facts was secondary.

An abundance of readily accessible information and a concomitant dearth of factual data imperil the field of journalism. A presumption about consensus enables the journalist to forgo heady research. Footwork has been replaced by the web-browser and a divide yawns between the journalist and her sources. Speculation becomes the name of the game; emphasis is no longer placed upon authenticity. All facts are relative and verification is a judgment call. Journalism has been gravely impaired. Its episodic nature betrays the alteration that it has undergone. Unless rumors and unfounded assertions are replaced with old-fashioned reporting, journalism will be swept away in a current of meme-fueled panic.

× **030100MD**

“I tripped over Maritain and got my dick stuck in Jung.”

—George Irwin

DIAMETRICALLY SPEAKING...

In his essay, “The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man” (1933), C.G. Jung addresses consciousness and the psyche, and their relevance in Post-World War industrialized society. The “spiritual

problem” arose in the aftermath of the First World War but had been centuries in the making. The “problem” is consciousness or, “the man who is aware of the immediate present” (Fabozzi 38). According to Jung, such a man possesses a “superlative consciousness” (38-9). If the superlatively conscious man is a recluse, it is so, because this man is at risk of losing his footing; at risk of drowning in the sea of the collective unconscious. The superlatively conscious man necessarily needs to divorce himself from tradition, as he is no longer determined by history.

Jung posits that the modern man synthesizes his superlative consciousness with creative proficiency. Creative proficiency being the means by which he may “atone” for “his break with tradition” (Fabozzi 40). He is aware of the horrors that have befallen man. He is also aware of man’s potential, via the sciences and technology, but these things—advents, developments and horrors—have caused modern man to wallow in uncertainty. They have had the effect of a fierce shelling on his psyche. The grim reality of the post-industrialized world has caused the psyche to waken and uncoil in him, like an angry Jörmungandr. In the psyche, the “problem” of modern man originates: “There has never been a time when the psyche did not manifest itself, but formerly it attracted no attention—no one noticed it. People got along without heeding it. But today we can no longer get along unless we give our best attention to the ways of the psyche” (42).

“As long as all goes well and psychic energy finds its application in adequate and well-regulated ways, we are disturbed by nothing from within” (Fabozzi 42). But modern man is disturbed. He is struck by psychic convulsions. The traditional avenues for man’s psyche are no longer open to him. The once and great creative outlets afforded him by ancient civilizations, where the corporeal body bid its time in relative harmony with its surroundings is no more. Jung refers to the 19th century and the division of labor and specialization as the catalyst for man’s angst.²⁹ Technological advents became superfluous—a machine for every man, or rather, a man for every machine. Scientific knowledge grew at an exponential rate. And from this knowledge came mellifluence—something to which Jung referred to as a “destructive opposite” (42). It is with this destructive opposite that man was forced to contend, as it

²⁹ REFER TO “**EVERYTHING IS ENCRYPTED,**” PP. 316-320.

subsumed the metaphysical paradigms of the past, replacing them with the harrowed psyche.

“...the conscious, modern man, despite his strenuous and dogged effort to do so, can no longer refrain from acknowledging the might of psychic forces. This distinguishes our time from all others” (Fabozzi 42-3).

Artists, Critics, Context: *Readings in and Around American Art Since 1945*. Ed. Paul F. Fabozzi. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2002.

× **030200MD**

I spent half an hour
 At Nigel Diner,
 Eating eggs and drinking coffee,
 Trying to make sense of the peculiar—the uncanny.
 I will not jump to conclusions,
 But is it possible to be rational?
 I am trying to understand several things at once:
 Faith, human nature, love.
 I am speculating.
 Duff said: “Writing is superior to action.”
 I no longer agree with David.
 I have traded some of my beliefs in for other things,
 Like anxiety...
 I am hopeful:
 I hope and hope and care little for the consequences of hope,
 And there *are* consequences:
 Disappointment, for instance, is one such consequence.
 But I would argue that
 The price that hope exacts isn’t unreasonable.
 It is just.
 We receive what we ask for.

× **030300MD**

PROFILING 'EVERGREEN'S' PROFILER

'Dancer'³⁰ called this afternoon. She left a message. She is good-natured. She is someone with whom it is easy to talk. While some wear a concealing mask, her face is honest and animated.

On Friday, I discerned frustration when the train was late. Her facial expressions revealed complexity of character—not a façade. There is something elusive about her, something mercurial, something in her expressions, something that doesn't come from training or that is a product of experience and suffering. It is native. It probably eludes her husband and alienates her from her peers. I think that is what drew me to her. *That*, and the way she stood in her shoes. She wore Ferragamos. She stood on the sides of her feet like a little girl. If at first I didn't dare look her in the face, I dared dwell on her shoes, and in them, marvelous feet.

× **030400MD**

Dear George,

Subject: *Quality and Anger*

Quality → an essential aspect of this writer's life. Craft is a sorry excuse for the absence of quality. Craft does not have a place in my life and work. Quality assumes the role that craft cannot fulfill. Quality means different things to different people. In my life, quality denotes honest effort-effort in the absence of artifice. Quality is another term for spontaneity, the antithesis of craft. I think it is a shame when critics refer to a writer's work as 'well-crafted.' In no way should a 'well-crafted' piece of work imply good work. As far as I can see, there is writing and there is craft—they cannot peacefully coexist; they are at odds.

Anger → behind every boxer's punch there is intention, pure and true. It belongs to the fighter alone. It is rare that he discloses his secret to his opponent. His secret represents his strength and the

³⁰ WHO IS 'DANCER?' SEE, *THE BEEKEEPER*, p. 142.

longer it is withheld, the stronger he becomes. His secret swells in his arms and swarms in his ears; it makes his heart as large as an elephant's; and as it pounds, it stirs the dead and explodes within his opponent's ears. His anger is monolithic.

-Russell



PUBLISHER’S NOTE: *Records from 030500MD-090102MD have been redacted in full and will not be permitted inclusion into the record as compiled, edited and formatted by Tom Shaw.*

EDITOR’S NOTE: *Due to extensive redaction, the gradual transition that Huggins made from a format herein already referred to as a collection to the novella and back again, will be, I regret, unclear to the reader. This is chiefly due to hitherto unforeseen “obstacles to full-disclosure.”*

× **090102-100102MD**

“Desert this mad and unfounded obsession with the so-called truth. In pursuit of truth, you are guaranteed a long and perilous run through a semantic maze that derives meaning only from your undivided attention.”

—George Irwin

³¹ < - KAUNAN, “ULCER - TORCH.” THE TORCH IS KNOWN TO EVERY LIVING MAN BY ITS PALE, BRIGHT FLAME; IT ALWAYS BURNS WHERE PRINCES SIT WITHIN. —OLD ENGLISH POEM

“Justice, although very often orphaned, remains the legitimate child of knowledge and truth. But as in any union, absent knowledge, truth is prey to guile. And in a world in which guile reigns, the ruse trumps candor. This is why a gift cannot be made of justice. It must be won.”

—Russell Huggins

THE KEY TO THE BEEKEEPER

THE PLAYERS

Senator Dishewalther [D-WV]...*Senator Robert Byrd*
District Court Judge Hartley Pettifog...*Stanley Sporkin*
Deputy Director Farrell...*John Edward McLaughlin*
Director, FBI, Louis Ferris...*Louis Freeh*
Brian Reza (Brian Reza & Associates)...*Brian Aryai*
Jaime Abad...*James Abadie*
'Dancer'...*Barbara Olson*
Sam Boslough...*Samuel Cohen*
Harry Sternheimer...*Harry Oppenheimer*
Nicky Sternheimer...*Nicky Oppenheimer*
Dick Stone...*Richard Perle*
Sir John Starr...*Sir Michael Rose*
Rupert Mitterrand...*Rupert Smith*
McShain...*General Kevin P. Byrne*

THE APPARATUS

Clover Lend Lease...*Bovis Lend Lease*
Hammer Consulting...*Gavel Consulting*
Irvington Group...*Livingston Group*
Reilly, Offal & Grange...*Weil, Gotshal & Manges*
Broussard Demolition...*Controlled Demolition, Inc.*
Ares Mines...*De Beers*

↓

THE BEEKEEPER, A NOVELLA

PART ONE: *TRANSCRIPTION*

MARCH 3rd 2001: On the date in question I was working as a recruiter, which means I pretended to review applications from my little office in Prince George's County—review them and shred them. It was a windowless office in a strip mall at the top of New Hampshire Avenue. Next door, accessible through a closet, was the Western Union front with a concealed radio detail in the rear. I had two tasks, both innocuous: shred applications, and once hourly consult a decrepit ASR-33 Teletype, which always elicited guffaws from the radio detail. And I assure you, the absurdity of the charade wasn't lost on me. At 5:00 ^{PM} I'd be issued a brief from a radio tech, an asset in street clothes, and handed a smudged teletype message. I'd lock up the office and drive into town. On March 3rd I was designated to meet the informant called 'Dancer,' then conduct an interview with a candidate named Whistler.

Dancer arrived at 6:00 ^{PM}. I handed her the teletype. It meant less to me than it did to her, although the converse is now true. We had met several times in the last few weeks, always for one drink at the Dubliner. She was kind, cultivated, with sparkling eyes and feline grace. Our chats were always stimulating.

Outside, the handler called Jagger was waiting with a car. I got in and we tacked to K Street, idled in front of 1520. "Two minutes," he said. Jagger ran inside, came back, put the car in gear, and patted my knee. He shot into traffic, slaloming around cars, fish-tailing onto Connecticut Ave. "Next stop," he said, screeching to a halt, double-parking in front of The Big Hunt, a popular bar on Dupont Circle. He opened the glove compartment, took out a manila envelope, handed me a picture. "Easy. Two dates, three—it doesn't matter."

"Gotcha," I replied.

I climbed out and Jagger sped away, lost in a sea of taillights. And it *would* be easy. By the time I was hired to do a job, all the chips were falling into place. I was the finger smoothing out the interlocking pieces in a jigsaw puzzle. I ran on autopilot.

I sat at the bar, three seats from the far end, ordered a drink. A few minutes passed and Whistler walked in with her cousin, Steve

Martin, just like the comedian. I knew everything about her that I would ever know, or so I thought: brown-hair, late twenties, slight features and narrow lips; a contractor with the Organization of American States. She was private-schooled, an underachiever, rebellious as a teenager, disaffected as an adult, with few close friends and so-called personality defects galore. In other words, the typical asset-stew. First name: *Aubrey*.

Aubrey sidled to the bar, ordered a beer and we struck up a conversation. Her expertise was Latin America, “With specializations in Nicaragua and ALBA,”³² she said. I feigned interest, asked about her favorite Latin American authors: Arenas, Gallegos, Infante, etc. She would get me a copy of Gallegos’ *Doña Bárbara*. “Everything you wanted to know about cunning but were afraid to ask.” She turned her hand into a cat-claw, pretended to scratch my face. And that was my cue. We arranged to meet again—for coffee, week the next.

That was it. The particulars don’t matter. I didn’t know what the Company wanted with Whistler; she thought I wanted a date. Long story short, candidates are vetted in this way. There is no office at which evaluations are conducted, no aptitude tests. You’ve been taking them since kindergarten. You are cultivated into a position from an early age. You think you’ve been on a date or in a relationship when really you’ve been on an interview—sometimes a long one, sometimes a one-night stand. And there are only a few traits of which your would-be handler is ignorant, that don’t show up on paper or under general observation, like a paranoid disposition, which is considered a boon. But it is all beside the point. My only objective was developing a superficial layer of trust. I needed to get into her house in Arlington, plant bugs, and everything else would be incidental.



ALPHA, EPSILON, IOTA, MU: I was assigned my *passé*—and by some accounts *asimine*—job as a reward for ‘time-served.’ It was benign and without dignity. But I was dependent upon the predictability—the illusion of sangfroid. But over coffee with Whistler my hard-won composure softened for the first time in several years. She produced a deck of Rorschach cards, said she

³² BOLIVARIAN ALLIANCE FOR THE AMERICAS

wanted to make sure I wasn't an axe-murderer. "This is a game my friend Lynette and I like to play," she said, shuffling the deck, as if there was a way to randomize a deck of Rorschach cards.

I pretended to think it was funny, answered every card quickly and with clichéd responses. She seemed satisfied, agreed to meet at a tapas bar across town the following week. I walked her to 19th St.

I turned to go when she called out, "Val! Hang on." She ran over, put her hands on my shoulders, and got up on her tiptoes, whispered, "*Alpha-epsilon-iota-mu*." And then she was gone, ferried away on the escalator to the Metro. Only when a man bumped into me did I realize I had been staring down Connecticut Ave. for several minutes. I decided to take a walk—*think*. When was the last time I had done that? What had Whistler meant? Why the Rorschach test? Had the tables been turned? Did it matter? Did it matter that I thought it mattered? Why was I agitated? I was soon at Kalorama Park. It was still early in the evening but I was exhausted. I found a bench by the playground and sat. I could feel my beeper vibrating but ignored it.

Yes, I was *agitated* and that wasn't a feeling that I enjoyed. It started as a very mild itch, something on which I couldn't put my finger. I could sense it but I couldn't name it. The beeper started to vibrate again, then my cell. I flipped open the Motorola, put it to my ear: "We're not far away. There's a car on the corner of Mintwood and Columbia."

It was a short walk. I knocked on the rear window of a Lincoln stretch. The window rolled down a few inches and a hand waved me in. Inside sat the handler called John Sprague and two men, one of whom I didn't recognize. The other was District Court Judge Hartley Pettifog. In the front seat next to the driver sat Senator Dishewalther [D-WV]. Sprague offered his hand and I shook it. Pettifog held a sheaf of papers. I expected Sprague to do the honors but it was Pettifog that spoke. "We have a man, Brian Reza, know him?" I didn't. "He needs an assistant. He doesn't get his hands dirty, doesn't know tech but has lots of access. We give him whatever access he needs but his eyes aren't so good. We need good eyes and a good memory. We've assigned you to him. You'll be back in time for your other thing but that is not a priority. This is a priority. Understand?" I nodded. He handed me the sheaf of papers. "Look this stuff over."

“Things are going to be a little different this time,” Sprague said. “Remember Waina Punavuori from Talisman Capital? Waina will be at your disposal—and vice-versa. But she goes where you go. Reza has the last say but you smooth things out for him when he needs it and it’s our understanding he needs that a lot. This all sound doable? Good. Usual room at the Hampshire. Need a ride?”

I didn’t.

And now I was certain that Whistler was Pettifog’s tool, or Sprague’s; that I had been the subject, not the other way around; that at the very least, she was an agonist, perhaps witting, perhaps not. I was beginning to decode the itch: it was the unsavory sense of expendability. They say every asset knows when it becomes a pawn. Somehow I thought I was privileged, anointed. I was wrong. I called Jagger, asked him to pick me up.



MARCH 5th 2001, NEW YORK CITY: Waina was waiting in my room at the Hampshire, sprawled out on the bed, papers lined up in orderly rows starting at the headboard. “Hi,” she called over her shoulder. I poured a drink, sat on the edge of the bed and put my hand on her back.

“Need help?” I asked.

“Just about done. One sec.” She put the papers in a pile and plopped them in a briefcase on the floor. “Okay, several things,” she said, turning on her side. “We do this job. I oversee you when you assist Brian when he’s working in an official capacity. He’s got dates with folks from Reilly, Offal & Grange as well as the Irvington Group. This means *Pm* in control—making sure he doesn’t drop the ball. You oversee me when we massage his front operations in the Bronx. They are rough and tumble, which means *you’re* in control. Usual checks and balances. Got it? They see through all of this bullshit anyway, the leverage, but I want to play it safe. I don’t want to die.” Waina pulled her left hand out from behind her back, revealed a bezel-set engagement ring.”

“Timmy?”

“Timmy,” she said, matter-of-factly. “So no funny business. I want to be a mother someday, believe it or not.”

I crossed the room, refilled my glass.

“Okay, I need to be clear here,” Waina said. “We’re just protection. They could hire thugs but that’s not the image they want

to project. And Reza's a top-down guy, so he won't want any interjection, input. I'm representing Talisman and you're representing the JD or whatever. It gives the show a certain patina. But I don't know what the show *is*. Talisman has been overrun with software developers for eighteen months. All of the brokers have been exiled to three rooms on the ground floor. We have offices reserved for trolls from Hammer Consulting. So it's high-profile. Anyway, we're flying blind."

"I expected as much. Look, I'm not bringing any questions to the Op." I pulled back the curtains, peered across the street at the Grace Hotel. Through a window I could see a maid fluffing pillows. "I'm not going to complain. We're going to do this thing and then I'm back on New Hampshire Ave.—just me and my trusty teletype. No questions."

"Sometimes I think there should be, Val: Questions. Is it healthy, what we do—the blind allegiance?"

"You want to talk about healthy? What about Happy Hills? You were ten and I was eight. I don't know about you, but I have no memory of my life before eight. This used to gnaw at me. Now I'm beginning to think it's a blessing. Even so, hard as I try to pretend otherwise, I miss what I don't remember. It's like this eight year old kid is going to show up someday, come knocking, and want a handout. I know I'll feel like I owe him something. I can already see the look in his eyes—the disappointment. Ever feel that way?"

"Sure I do, Val."



MARCH 15th 2001, THURSDAY: I got back to the office on the morning of the 15th. The Western Union was busy and the radio techs had their elbows on a table, poking at the guts of a receiver, handing each other tools, arguing: "...*that's the whole point of a dielectric, you idiot...*" I went to my desk, put my feet up. I rubbed my chin and realized I hadn't shaved. The phone rang. It was the Talisman switchboard: "This is a call from Waina Punavuori for Val Tyner. Accept?"

"Yes."

"Val? Waina. Look, I feel like we parted on a sour note. So I was thinking, I have to be in your neck of the woods on Friday... Want to meet for lunch?"

"Sure. That'd be good. Martin's?"

“Martin’s it is. I’ll call when I get in.”

Waina needed something. The job hadn’t ended on a sour note. For all intents and purposes, it was a success. We rarely left Reza’s side, travelling with him from meetings in Lower Manhattan to warehouses in the Bronx where I joined a small ad-hoc security detail to lock down the buildings in which Reza was doing business. One nondescript warehouse had been converted into a dormitory with floor-to-ceiling bunks, industrial kitchen and a recreation-room. Still another warehouse had a heavily guarded security perimeter. This was the warehouse in which meetings with Reilly, Offal & Grange, the Irvington Group and Clover Lend Lease were conducted. Representatives from Hammer Consulting and the National Demolition Association were also in attendance, including members of the Broussard demolition dynasty. Reza, Sam Boslough and Jaime Abad conducted the meetings. Waina transcribed the minutes. As far as I could tell, nothing of great consequence was discussed and I’m sure Waina’s minutes would reflect that.



THURSDAY EVENING: We met at Jaleo, a tapas bar on 7th. It had been a good day and I had a feeling it would prove to be a good evening. Aubrey was in high spirits, had color in her cheeks and smiled a lot. She had brought a copy of the Gallegos book, *Doña Bárbara*. “Will you read it?” she asked.

“Absolutely,” I lied.

She was likeable which made my job simpler. But she wasn’t easily probed. Her past was stock so I was confident that she was someone’s asset, either working me or distracting me. From where we sat, I could see Jagger across the street, smoking in a reclined car seat. I asked Aubrey about her childhood, brothers and sisters and she described running naked through the streets in the rain, drawing with crayons on the living room wall, fond memories of a particular stuffed bear. I recounted stories of my own, of birthday parties that never happened, of riding on the shoulders of a father that never was, of my mother’s kind smile. She asked me about the process whereby which I remember things:

“Do you remember things *linguistically*?” she slurred.

Not very subtle, I thought, but my chief fear was that she was probing for triggers, every asset’s unspoken nightmare: that your memories aren’t your own; that they are manufactured; that you are

an unwitting machine and but one trigger away from being brought under another's control. And worst of all, has this happened already? And if so, how many times? But if she were one of Pettifog's assets or Sprague's, then this was just a test. I had nothing to lose.

"I do both," I said. "I visualize words as pictures, each letter in a different color...synaesthesia. Runs in the family, actually. My mother, too, and this is pretty helpful at Goddard." And that was my perennial cover—*spaceflight engineer*—while Goddard was the sanctioned backstop. Only rarely did someone ask, "*What kind of engineering?*" Until now...

"What *kind* of engineering, Val?" Aubrey refilled her glass with sangria, then mine.

I cleared my throat, managed, "Well, uh, systems design for the Lunar Reconnaissance Project—onboard cooling, propulsion..."

"Neat!" she said, rubbing her hands together.

"So, favorite country to which you've travelled in Latin America?" I asked. I was eager to change the subject. An asset was expected to know his cover well. I didn't: *spaceflight engineer*? Give me a break! The Co. wasn't without a sense of humor.

"Oh, Venezuela. Definitely Venezuela. *Caracas!*" she shouted, giggling, the sangria making her eyes glassy. She excused herself and I nodded to Jagger who I could see lower his sunglasses and wink before disengaging the clutch and tearing into the night.

For a job, it was a decent night. She invited me back to her place, said I could stay if I followed some ground rules: No 'hanky-panky.' We lay in her bed, talked into the night, observed the rules, or *rule*. She grew tired, turned out the light on the nightstand, soon fell asleep. I drew her close to me, put my left hand on her chest, and held her wrist in my right hand, listened to her respiration, felt her pulse. When I was sure she had sunken into a delta sleep, I slipped out of bed, tiptoed out of her bedroom and planted the bugs, all three, which took less than four minutes.

When I woke, Whistler was gone. She left a note, said I was free to drink whatever coffee was left in the pot.



I spent the morning shredding papers, pulling dead branches off a Norfolk Pine and flipping through a week-old copy of the Examiner. At 10:00 ^{AM}, one of the radio techs popped his head into

the office, said it was a good day for take-out, which meant Deputy Director Farrell wanted an impromptu in the Chinese restaurant at the end of the strip. He probably wanted to be briefed on the Reza business.

Farrell and an aid were sitting in the restaurant window, facing each other. Farrell was wearing a grey suit and matching scowl. The aid stood, let me slide into the booth, then went outdoors, lit a cigarette.

“He’s a magician, you know,” Farrell said, pointing at the aid with a chopstick. “Tricks you would never believe. Anyway, I’m not saying he did an end-run around me, but Sprague talked to you before he talked to me—Sprague and Dishewalther and—well, you’re not biting. Let me try another tack. Hungry?”

“No, I’ve got something lined up for lunch.”

“So, how do I put it? Ever hear of Br’er Rabbit? Of course you have—a classic trickster. They destabilize things, shake up the order, play at subterfuge, subvert language, disinform. Would you know a trickster if you saw one? Okay, okay. So you and Punavuori are on the Reza detail. Considering what you’ve seen—what you’ve heard—you getting the willies yet?”

I stared at Farrell, waited.

“So if you had to pick a trickster character out of this milieu,” Farrell continued, “who would you choose: Sprague, Reza? What about Dishewalther?”

This was Farrell’s approach. You had to let him do his dance and conduct an invisible orchestra with his chopsticks. Sometimes he’d even do a spoon-bending routine, talk about Uri Geller: “*He tipped me off on zirconium deposits in Malawi. Made me a fortune.*”

Farrell knocked on the window to get the aid’s attention, waved him in. The aid sat, opened a file, and took out several photographs. “Recognize anyone?”

I pointed to a photograph, tapped on a face with my pointer finger. “Genevieve Broussard,” Farrell said, “Broussard Demolition—anyone else?”

“Only a couple of faces I didn’t see,” I said, sorting through the photographs.

“In the Bronx—”

“In the Bronx, yes,” I said.

“Good. Okay. That was a meet-and-greet. I understand Waina got the minutes. Alright, then, Reza is our Br’er Rabbit. He’s wily—a

wily rabbit. Tad, can a rabbit be wily?" The aid shrugged his shoulders. "Tad's much better on stage, dressed like a penguin."

I glanced at my watch. I didn't want to be late for Waina.

"Okay, I know you have your hands full at the Western Union." Farrell sniggered. "That Jagger still keeping you company?" I closed my eyes, nodded wearily. "Good, good. You know he used to be motor pool? Hey, ask him about his bees sometime. He's an amateur apiarist. And one more thing, Val, speaking of things that sting, that's not what this is all about, not this time. This time we're facilitators. Waina, too. We're keeping out the riff-raff. Keeping things oiled."



I was a few minutes late and Billy Martin's was crowded. I heard my name called from across the street. It was Waina, waving me over. "Listen, it's a zoo in there and such a nice day. Let's just get an ice cream and go for a stroll. We can wander up toward Dumbarton."

Waina held her ice cream cone in her right hand, took my arm with her left. "We've got trouble, or at least *I* do. I had my cleaning lady in on Thursday morning. You know—the Crystal City *cleaning* lady?" I knew. She was very thorough: never left a bug behind. "Well, I was bugged. Even one under a Pepto-Bismol cap."

"Well, I had Chinese with Farrell this morning," I began. "He was pretty squirrely. I think he wishes he was born with more tentacles. Odds say he wants eyes and ears on everyone. It's like when we were kids at Happy Hills. They'd blindfold us to play pin the tail on the donkey. We'd get close to the donkey with the stick, start swinging and then the other kids would move it. It's the same thing. We're blindfolded and they're going to make sure we never get within striking distance of their donkey."

"So you're saying they're bugging us just to make sure we don't try—that we don't get curious."

"I'd say that makes sense. You have chocolate on your chin."

"Thanks. I suppose it *does* make sense." She dabbed at her chin with a napkin. "If Timmy thought he was living in a bugged apartment he'd walk in a heartbeat."

"It'd make things easier for me."

"It would, wouldn't it?"



I was asleep in the bathtub, the water flowing over the sides when my beeper began to vibrate. When it vibrated off the edge of the sink and hit the floor, I woke up. When the phone in the bedroom started to ring, I climbed out of the tub. That's when I slipped, hit my head on the radiator...

St. Claire³³: What do you remember next?

Tyner: It was my mother. She was on her knees, her hand on my forehead. Her voice was coming from far away, like through a tunnel. She was holding my head off the floor with her left hand and I could see her wedding band and I could smell hand lotion.

St. Claire: Then?

Tyner: I remember a house in the country. A woman with a blue-checked shirt and a smock. I remember feeling happy to see her. She was climbing over a knoll toward the house, carrying a tin pail. The pail was filled with strawberries.

St. Claire: How old were you?

Tyner: I don't know. I don't have a sense of age in this picture but I know I'm looking out of my own eyes.

Durand: Wake him up! Is he going to remember any of this?

St. Claire: No, pretty unlikely, but he seems to have had a similar accident before the age of eight. It's a fluke. We'll tell him what happened: that Jagger found him lying on the bathroom floor in a pool of his own blood and brought him to the hospital.

Tyner: Who is that? Who else is there? Is that you, Ushomi?

Dr. St. Claire handed Dr. Peter Durand a clipboard with Tyner's stats. She walked to Tyner's bedside, rested her hand on his shoulder, squeezed gently. "I'm going to snap my fingers and when I do, you will wake up. You won't remember this conversation." She snapped her fingers and Tyner's eyes opened.



APRIL FOOL'S DAY: Conference call with Leanne Mandelbrot of FEMA, Terry Spits of Lawrence Livermore, Brian Reza and Attorney General Louis Ferris.

³³ × 020203MD: "THE SWIFTEST METHOD WHEREBY WHICH THAT WHICH IS TRANSCENDENT IN MAN MAY BE ATTENUATED, IS PSYCHOANALYSIS." —TOM FAHY

Ferris: “We want you to coordinate with the Sandia field office, get them harmonized with your radio detail, issue contracts to the Chinese at Manzanillo—all Chinese drivers, every last one. It’s historic.”

“Craig Harper from Pyramid Logistics is your contact at the NAFTA port,” Reza interrupted. “We want your radio people to tag the trucks. Guillermo Páez is the Mexican placeman from Temple Trucking and he’s operating with a fresh lease agreement so the tires of his trucks won’t spontaneously ignite on US soil.”

Mandelbrot: “Brian?” Reza ignored her.

Reza: “If you see a rogue Teamster, shoot him!” Ferris laughed on his end. “That’s just a joke. But if they stand in front of the truck, you can drive over them. I think there’s actually an escape-clause about that, right Ferris?”

Ferris: “It’s a landmark thing, folks. Interagency cooperation and all that. And a feather in the cap of the NAFTA people. It’ll give everybody a hard-on, especially Clinton.”

“And the cargo,” I asked.

“The cargo is—” started Spits.

“Let me explain!” Ferris interrupted. “It’s *symbolic*, Val. It could be tofu or rice noodles. Who gives a shit! We are making a point, see? Chinese port in Mexico, Chinese drivers in Mexican trucks, Mexican trucks on US soil—point A to point B, no hitches, no hiccups, tight surveillance, no Teamsters—”

“*Especially* no teamsters,” Reza interjected.

“Shouldn’t be a problem. We’re greasing the skids,” I said.

“Yes, right, exactly!” said Reza, “Greasing the skids.”



APRIL 2nd 2001, 1:15 ^{AM}: The phone was ringing. I wasn’t asleep. I ran my fingers over the stitches that ran from my hairline to my left eyebrow. I picked up the phone and put it to my ear. I could hear bar sounds in the background, clinking glasses. “Val?” It was Whistler. “Val, I haven’t heard from you, come out, it’s insane tonight. We should pick up where we left off, maybe break some rules. Wait, I can’t hear you, let me—let me go into the bathroom.” I could hear a scream without any terror in it, the bar sounds grew muffled, indistinct female voices, water running. “Is it late? I’m sorry I called *so* late...” There was a click, silence. She hung up.

I put the phone in its cradle, stared at the ceiling, and wrote notes in the air with my finger. At Happy Hills I would do the same, but not notes. I would draw faces or landscapes, often the outlines of a building...

...cottage, shack, tall grass licking its clapboards, a steep slope that extends from the west wall. I know it's the west wall, knew it. A slope, ravine and the foundation had begun to give, wrested away from the house, pulled into the ravine, the wall cracking, floorboards warping. Lying on the kitchen floor, the cold tiles, listening to pipes moan, crack and sheer, water flowing under the baseboards. A low thumping sound: thwack—thwack—thwack. I thought it was my heart beating, but there was that, too, but much faster—the little valves smacking open and closed like a screen door. A pair of boots in the doorway; another pair of boots, this pair kicking at a heap, a white heap, a heap of... "Lieutenant, it's 'Dead Eyes,'" the voice attached to the kicking boots called out. From somewhere else, disembodied, "Alive, is she alive?" Boots answered: "Affirmative. The kid's here, too!" A third pair of boots came through the doorway, came close. I felt a gloved hand pull me up by my hair, drag me to the heap, place my head a few inches from the heap's face. "Shoot her, Corporal—in the forehead. I want gunpowder in the kid's eyes!"

At 4:00 ^{AM} I woke up screaming. The stitches felt distressed and I could feel a crust of dried blood in my eyebrow. I climbed out of bed, brewed a pot of coffee, fired up the Seeburg in the living room. I rested my hands on its glass shell, listened to the whir of its motors, the crackle through the speakers of the needle bumping on the vinyl, and could see the jukebox's cool blue lights oscillating behind my eyelids, sense a river of electrons spiraling through vacuum tubes. "It's just you and me, Patsy," I whispered.

*I go out walkin'
After midnight
Out in the moonlight
Just like we used to do
I'm always walkin'
After midnight
Searching for you...*



"Are you with us, Jagger?" I asked, rolling down the window, leaning my head into the wind.

“Am I with *you?*” asked Jagger, his expression hidden behind his mirrored aviator glasses. With his free hand he riffled through a collection of CDs scattered in the foot well. “I’m with Unkulunkulu, brother. And today is No Moon Day!” He popped a CD into the dash, fiddled with the volume. “Here’s my sermon to you, Ushomi.” Red Sovine relating the story of “Phantom 309” roared through the speakers. “Sorry,” Jagger said, patting my knee, turning down the volume, “By the way, what happened with the little brown-haired girl—the Bridget Fonda doppelganger? Get lucky?” Jagger wagged his head back and forth, deepened his voice, and did a Red Sovine imitation: “*Well, Joe lost control an’ went into a skid. Gave his life to save that bunch of kids...*”

“I followed the rules, Ushomi. I’m good at that.”



APRIL 13th 2001, FRIDAY: We were at the marina of the Grand Bay Hotel in Manzanillo waiting for Craig Harper’s yacht. “Almost like being a V.I.P., right Val? Or being on a honeymoon,” Waina said, not expecting a response. “By the way, that scar makes you look mighty roguish. It’s so pink! I bet it gets sunburned before the rest of your freckled face...”

Harper’s yacht glided to a rest at the dock. Two men dressed in white leapt off, secured the boat. “Logistics pays,” I said, elbowing Waina as we climbed aboard the Azimut 98. She snickered and poked me in the ribs. I followed her up a short flight of steps, then down a semi-circular stairway into the saloon. Harper stood aft at the bar, talking on the phone. He motioned us to the port-side sofa. He finished his call, made some notes in a ledger, and cleared his throat.

“Drink?” he asked in a thick southern drawl, pouring himself bourbon.

“No, thanks,” I said.

“Suit yourselves.” He picked up the ledger, turned the pages, found what he was looking for. “*Pun-a-vo-ori*—is that the right pronunciation?” Waina lied, nodded. “And *Tyner, Val*, good, okay,” Harper leaned forward, put his hand on the head of a bust of an Indian, turned it so it was facing us, moved it to the edge of the bar: “You familiar with Yonaguska—old Drowning-Bear?” He didn’t wait for an answer. “He was a big ‘un, 6’ 3.” A little white blood in there, too. You’ve never heard of him because he wasn’t a killer.

He's what the people on the Hill today would call a dip-lo-mat. This is the Chief that helped broker the Treaty of 1819, sold off the Cherokee lands on the Tuckasegee River, won himself a nice 640 acre plot for his cooperation. A diplomat, see?" He patted Yonaguska on the head, moved him aside. "And they say the day of the diplomat is dead. Ha!" Harper slammed his palm on the bar to emphasize the point. He leaned against the paneled wall, smoothed out his shirt, and wiped the palms of his hands on his pants, "Y'all done good. Hear everything went smoothly at the port—your people did real well." Harper picked up a black bag, threw it into the center of the saloon. "Don't spend it all in one place—compliments of our diplomat-friends in the North." Waina and I had been in the business long enough to know you didn't rebuff a tribute from a thug in public. If your ethics kicked in, you could burn throw the cash in the tub, pour lighter fluid on it, or give it to the Salvation Army; it was all the same—the Co. didn't impound money. I picked up the bag and we headed for the stairs. "One more thing, kids, about the Chief." He was patting the Indian's head again. "Who brought the Gospel of Matthew to the Cherokee? Yonaguska. Only took 640 acres and a little charisma to sell his people down the river. For insurance and steel, the thugs in the Bronx are about to do the same thing. That's progress, kids."

As we were getting off the Azimut, to my surprise, Dancer was getting on. Her eyes lit up, "Hey, *how...*" she started. Then she thought better of it, put her head down and aimed for the saloon.

"Wasn't that Karla Dietrich, the Solicitor General's wife?" I nodded, said nothing. "And she obviously knew *you*." The itch was back and the scar on my forehead began to twinge. Once upon a time I was the guy that smoothed out the interlocking pieces of the puzzle, now I was a piece—one of those nebulous blue-sky pieces with a sliver of cloud; a piece without context.



When I answered the door I could see the tip of a silencer poking out of the cuff of Whistler's jacket. "Can I come in?"

"Be my guest." I stepped aside, let her pass. She climbed the split-level's short flight of steps to the living room, took off her jacket, and threw it on the couch. "Nice place for a bachelor." She sat on the couch, put her feet up on the table, and rested the gun in her lap.

I went to the kitchen, got a beer out of the fridge, returned to the living room, and leaned against the wall opposite Whistler.

“I’m looking for a new hobby, Val. See, I get bored so easily. I was into rocks for awhile, then bulbs, exotic ones—flower bulbs. I even started to collect old 45s. I didn’t even have a snazzy hi-fi on which to play them, unlike some people.” She raised the muzzle of the 9mm, pointed at the Seeburg and fired into its glass dome. Shards exploded in all directions. She covered her eyes and I did the same. “Now I’m excited about genealogy,” she continued without skipping a beat. “Ever get into that, poking around the family tree? Well, imagine my surprise when I find out we’re kin!” She pointed at me with the gun, and then tapped herself on the chest with the muzzle. “Ends up we’re cousins of a sort. At least we have the same uncle.”

I knew where she was going with this, just not why or what kind of impression it was supposed to make on me. “Farrell,” I said.

She put the gun down on the table. “Farrell. Right. Where were you turned out, Val?” I didn’t answer.

“Doesn’t matter. I already know. The irony, right? I was a Fox Hollow girl, tartan skirt and everything. Ends up your barnyard and my barnyard have a lot in common, including Boards of Directors. Let me tell you the age at which your memories start, then you can tell me the age at which my memories start, deal? But first grab me one of those cold beers.”

I was headed for the kitchen when I heard the amplified spitball-through-a-straw sound of a bullet discharging through a silencer. I didn’t need to turn around to know that Whistler had shot herself in the head.



MAY DAY: Jagger pulled off from Water Street, turned into the parking lot of the District Yacht Club. I concentrated on the sound of the gravel crunching under the tires. “We’re here, Ushomi.” I took a deep breath, got out. Tad, Farrell’s aid, was sitting on the hood of a limo. He waved me over.

“They’re out behind. Want to see a trick?” Tad was holding a white rose.

I ignored him, gave Jagger the thumbs-up and went out back. Sprague, Dishewalther, Pettifog and Farrell were variously standing

and sitting by a picnic table. Farrell waved me over, shook my hand and patted me on the shoulder. “We’ve got a mess—” started Farrell.

Dishewalther interrupted, “No, *Tyner’s* got the mess.”

“Look, Val, it’s no one’s fault,” said Sprague. “The Whistler girl was clinically depressed, medicated. Her work performance had been deteriorating. These things happen, okay? It is what it is. And a shame what she did to that jukebox.”

Dishewalther produced an envelope, spilled a stack of pictures on the picnic table. “This one’s my favorite.” Dishewalther picked up a picture in which Whistler is wiping sauce off my face at Jaleo. “You were such a nice couple and homicide thinks so too, at least for now. You had so much going for each other.”

Pettifog was the only one sitting. He was rubbing his temples. “Dishewalther, for Christ’s sake, how many times do you want to drive over this dog?” Dishewalther put his hands in his pockets, backed up. “You’re going back to the Bronx, Val. You’re going to finish what you started with Reza. He’ll tell you what you need. The radio techs go with you. You can wash your hands of the Whistler girl. It’s history.”

I headed for the car. Jagger was standing with Tad by the limo. “You should have seen what I just saw. He turned that white rose into a red rose!”



It was my last morning in the Western Union—a rainy morning, cool. The radio techs had cleared out, left tools scattered on their work tables, bits of wire. There was a scorched trash can in the middle of the floor. I checked their lockers: all empty, save for one in the bottom of which stood a pair of work boots. I put them in a garbage bag, wiped down but left the tools. In my windowless office sat two things: a telephone and in the far corner, the Norfolk Pine. It was dead. What did I expect? I put the telephone in the garbage bag but left the Norfolk Pine. Jagger was waiting outside in the car, smoking. A crew was already boarding up the shop, padlocking the doors, unfastening the large yellow and black Western Union sign. A kid, no older than 21, was painting over the “*Sending So Much More Than Money*” slogan with a big roller. If I ever had an itch, it was gone. I woke this morning, put my slippers on

and crunched over the glass from the jukebox on my way to the bathroom. I felt nothing. From inside the car Jagger leaned over, opened the passenger side door. On the stereo, Red Sovine's "Teddy Bear," and I knew the lyrics to this one, every last word:

*I was on the outskirts of a little southern town,
Trying to reach my destination
Before the sun went down
The old CB was blaring away on channel one-nine
When there came a little boy's voice on the radio line.
And he said, "Breaker, one-nine, is anyone there?
Come on back, truckers, and talk to Teddy Bear."
Well, I keyed the mike and I said,
"Well, you got it, Teddy Bear."
And the little boy's voice came back on the air.
"Preciate the break. Who we got on that end?"
I told him my handle, and then he began:*

*"Now, I'm not supposed to bother you fellas out there,
Mom says you're busy and for me to stay off the air.
But, you see, I get lonely and it helps to talk
'Cause that's about all I can do.
I'm crippled and I can't walk."*



In the warehouse on Liberty Street in the Bronx I could hear Reza's voice but I couldn't see him: "What does 'body count' mean, gentleman!?" It was early, not quite 5:00 ^{AM}, and I could see bodies in the floor-to-ceiling bunks begin to rustle. There was sudden, shrill feedback from a megaphone and Reza started to repeat his last statement: "What does 'body count' mean gentle..." I saw motion on a catwalk near the ceiling. Reza had spotted me and was making his way to a mechanical lift. He decided to start our conversation using the megaphone: "Breakfast?" his voice squawked, echoed. "I don't eat it but we could ride to Gun Hill, find something, and talk about your techs. They do good work, by the way—real self-starters. Half are on TETRA,³⁴ half I got under

³⁴ TERRESTRIAL TRUNKED RADIO

3900 grave digging.” Reza hopped off the lift, rubbed his knees. He looked back at the bunks, said, “These guys are something else. This is the aftermath of go-pills and round-the-clock, back-breaking work. You’re looking at some of the world’s top spelunkers. We even got them patches from the Spray Polyurethane Foam Alliance. Cool, huh? Gay-ass patch if you ask me. Reza dipped into his pocket, produced a handful of pills and dry-swallowed them. “No sleep for the wicked. We go. Your car or mine?”



Jagger was sailing at a nice clip, keeping the volume down. Reza sat next to him, mouth running like diarrhea. “One little shit actually scratches off the ‘polyurethane’ part of his patch, markers in ‘Li6,’ *you know*, for Lithium-6. It’s that bad. Like summer camp. Oh, oh, oh, SLOW! Pull up here. *Pull up!* Stop. Get out, come with me. Not you, brother, just Val.” Jagger pulled his sunglasses down on his nose, gave Reza a ‘once-over.’

I got out. Reza had bounded across the street, was climbing over a guardrail. He was flailing both arms: “Come on!” It was early and the traffic was light so I strolled over to Reza. He was sweating. “Come on, man, you won’t be sorry. I feel like a fucking kid and I’ve got a Goddamn law firm named after me. The irony!”

I followed closely behind Reza, running with my hands in my pockets to keep from freezing. “Stay on the lane,” he shouted. “You’ll kill yourself if you slam into a monument!” I could barely see him but I could hear his feet receding.

“Wait!” I called. I looked around, squinted. We were in Woodlawn Cemetery. Feet again. Reza was backtracking.

“Let’s go! We can’t do this after sunrise.”

“Do *what*, Brian?” He was off running again. I followed. We were soon in a round clearing in the center of which towered a mausoleum.

Reza seemed to read my thoughts. “It’s not just *any* mausoleum, Val. It’s *Jay Gould’s* mausoleum. This way.” He marched up the front steps, pulled keys from around his neck. “You’ve got to hoist yourself up here. This whole grating’s going to swing away. We’re actually going to weld this thing shut next week—we’ve got a tunnel running all the way from 3900 on Webster right to Gould’s mausoleum!” Reza was almost hyperventilating, either from excitement or from the go-pills. “Okay, okay, round key, square,

shit! Here, here. This bastard, right here.” He unlocked the gate and pulled it open. “Go! The interior door will swing right in. I’m behind you.”

The interior door swung easily, the hinges barely squeaking. I expected it to be dark, but there was light coming from a stairwell and spotlights on tripods. Reza pushed passed me, dropped down into the center of the mausoleum, and lifted his arms: “Welcome to the Bank of New York!” he announced. “Come on, get down from there. We’ll take a tunnel back. Jagger’s actually parked right outside 3900. We can freak the hell out of him.”

Reza was already moving down a flight of stairs over which steel plates had been bolted, his footsteps receding again. Once more, I was hot on his heels. The stairwell terminated at a steel door that Reza was leaning into with his shoulder. “Help me, damn it. . .ugh,” he said, straining. I leaned into the door, digging into the ground with my feet. It soon gave, opening about twelve inches, just enough to squeeze through. “It’s all a big joke, see, Black Friday, Gould. . .” Reza was on his hands and knees, feeling for something. There was a surge of power and fluorescent lights started flickering to life, revealing the length of the tunnel. “This one’s done. Nice, huh? Onward! Where was I? Black Friday. Gould corners the gold market, really has it in a choke-hold. His objective was two-fold: drive up the price of gold and in turn drive up the price of wheat. Most of that wheat made it onto his Erie Railroad freighters. He was charging two, three, four times the usual rate, making windfall profits. General Grant got wise, dumped gold on the market, the premium to face-value plummeted and the public panicked. How much did Gould lose that day? Who knows? What he didn’t lose at the outset, he lost in lawsuits. Either way, Gould wants his gold back.”

“What about the other tunnels?” I asked.

“The other tunnels. . .” Reza was rummaging in his pockets again, but they were empty. “Fuck, it doesn’t matter. I can see the light at the end of the tunnel. The other tunnels, uh, *right*—one to the Dunlop Mausoleum and one to the Goelet Mausoleum, all assholes-in-arms.”

The ‘end of the tunnel’ was an unlit and unheated warehouse nestled between Webster Avenue and the Metro-North Railroad. “I’m really hungry now, Val, how about breakfast?”



AUGUST 1st 2001: I was lying in bed at the Hampshire. The TV was on but the sound was off...

...she said I still had a fever, and that I couldn't go to school. She'd take another day off. She'd sit in bed with me, bring me soup, and play board games...

When the knocking became persistent, I woke, climbed out of bed, and peered through the peep-hole. "I know you're there, Val. Just open up." It was Waina. I unlocked the door and she opened it. "Jesus, Val, you look like shit." She started putting empty bottles in the garbage. She opened the curtains, light poured in. She turned toward the bed, a perfect silhouette.

"You look just like her."

"Like who, Val?"

"Doesn't matter. Sprague sick you on me?"

"Sprague and Farrell. They say you left the Church Street project two days ago, abandoned your little radio friends."

"They know what they're doing, Waina. They could wire those antennas blindfolded with their dicks. In fact, that's what I've had them do."

"Nice image. Want to tell me what's going on—get it all off your chest?" She took off her shawl, laid it on the end of the bed. She sat, took my hands, put them in her lap, and rubbed my fingers, "Why don't I tell *you* something. Before Happy Hills, there are no memories, right? Well, Timmy and I went to Bistro Lepic the other night. I tried to drag you in there once, remember? So in the middle of dinner I happen to look up and see my reflection in a mirror across the room. Then I realize my reflection is moving, that there are no mirrors. But I might as well have been looking at myself. The hair was different, but everything else, I mean, just uncanny..."

Waina had tears in her eyes. "What did you do?"

"I didn't do anything," she said. "Have you ever imagined what it must take to destroy a child's memory? I don't know what I saw at Bistro Lepic, or who I saw, but I *did* realize I never wanted to find out how I was utterly destroyed and remade. I love you, Val. You know there was someone that said the same thing to you before you were eight and to me before I was ten. We were turned into something I don't understand; something I'm not sure I even like.

But I'd rather be confused than dead." Waina got up, stood in the light from the window, put on her shawl. She paused in the doorway for a moment. I thought she might say something, stay. She didn't.



BRUCKNER BAR & GRILL: Reza had a half-dozen of my radio techs on go-pills, too. They were getting thin, strung out and worst of all, nervous. They'd had several late-night encounters with the spelunkers. One moment they'd be in an empty hallway in 1 WTC or 2 and the next, one of Reza's men would be beside them, breathing heavily, their faces painted like Green Berets, a sinister hissing sound coming from their O² tanks. They chanted: "*The whole thing I think is sick—the whole thing I think is sick—*" ad nauseam.

By September 9th, Sunday, all communiqués from Sprague's people were mysteriously over: nothing from Dishewalther, nothing from Farrell or Ferris. Complete radio silence. The last message I received from Farrell was one week ago to the day. He told me to pull the plug on the techs, let them walk away. The agency wanted to reabsorb them.

At 7:00 in the evening I was testing a TETRA tower in the Bronx, the last of them. I heard Reza call up from the street. He was looking like his old self, in a suit, hair slicked back. "You about finished?" he called up.

We drove to the Bruckner Bar & Grill. "Let's buy each other one drink," he said. I followed him inside. We stood at the bar and each ordered a bottle of beer. "I'm not sure what we're supposed to be toasting. But here's to it anyway." We toasted with the necks of the bottles. Reza put his bottle down, looked at himself in the mirror behind the bar. His shoulders started to shake. When he looked at me, he had tears in his eyes. "I have kids, Val. I have kids, for Christ's sake!" And he left.



SEPTEMBER 10th 2001: I was awake and dressed when the knocking started. The curtains were open and the room was filled with late summer light. It was Jagger. I opened the door and I know his eyes were twinkling behind his mirrored sunglasses. "Ready,

Ushomi? I don't think this island weather suits you. You're more of a swamp thing—a mosquito gigolo.”

We were headed south on I-95, the Sun a smoldering basketball in the west, when I remembered what Farrell had said about Jagger. “Farrell told me something about you. He said you were a beekeeper.”

“He said I was *a* beekeeper? No, man, I am *the* beekeeper.” He pulled his sunglasses down on his nose, winked, patted my knee and turned the volume knob up until Red Sovine's voice rattled the windshield:

*I came back and told him to fire up that mike
And I'd talk to him as long as he'd like.
“This was my dad's radio,” the little boy said,
“But I guess it's mine and Mom's now
'Cause my daddy's dead...*

"It is important to note that facts, in and of themselves, lead brief lives. Once described, a fact becomes bearsay. What is more, it becomes managed. This is the conspiracy of information in which we all participate."

—George Irwin

PART TWO: *TRANSLITERATION*

SEPTEMBER 11th 2001, 12:30 ^{AM}: "We're here." Jagger produced a pencil, jotted something onto a pad. He took his sunglasses off, slid down in his seat, and leaned over, whispered, "Your place is staked. I suppose you knew that." He fished under his seat, pulled out a pair of binoculars, handed them to me. "Right there on the end, three from the corner, the Crown Vic."

"You're saying I'm being burned," I said, adjusting the focus.

"Don't flatter yourself, Val. You're not that important. As far as I understand it, you've been a perfect cog. That doesn't mean I think you should go home. Whistler's blood probably ain't even dry yet. Who cleaned that up, by the way?" Jagger started to tap on the steering wheel with the pencil.

"I really don't know, Jag. This seat recline back further?"

"It's broken. I'm going to sniff around. Give me your keys. I'm going to jog down Q Street and double back through the alley, take the ladder up. I'll call the car phone, let you know what's what." Jagger peeled off his black sweater, put his sunglasses back on, and wiped his palms on his pant legs, got out. I watched him in the side-view mirror until he disappeared on Q. As soon as he rounded the corner, the Crown Vic's headlamps came to life. I cracked the door and when I heard the Vic's tires squealing, I rolled out, moved on all fours to the rear of the car. The Crown Vic approached, slowed. A door opened and a set of hard-soled shoes approached. "Empty," someone said. "Toss it?"

A voice responded, "No, no time. Let's go." I crawled to the passenger side of the car, lay down by the curb, listened to the car pull away, and turn down Q Street.

"Hey!" It was Jagger, a six-pack of Budweiser cans under his arm. "Changing the oil?"

"Christ! You just missed the Vic."

"I know. Close, right? I tried the car phone. You didn't answer. Good news is: you still have a phone. Bad news is: you moved."

“I did *what?*” I was now sitting on my knees on the sidewalk.

“You cleared out. Looks like the Grinch stopped by while you were in the Big Apple, took the Christmas Tree, the ornaments, stockings, everything.”

“You knew about this?” I asked. But I already knew the answer.

“Well, there were rumors, Val. And I’ve always got my ear to the wall. Do you smell smoke? No. You haven’t been burned, trust me. But there are things you need to know, and being your main man, naturally I’m the one to bring you up to speed.”

“Listen Jag, not out here. Let’s...” A headache was coming, right between my eyes. “Let’s...”

“We’ll go to the diamond on V, sit on the pitcher’s mound. Now’s a good a time as any to go native. He lifted the six-pack over his head. “And you’re going to need these. The Grinch doesn’t like beer, I guess.”



THE OUTFIELD: There was a raccoon patrolling the pitcher’s mound so we sat under a tree in the outfield. We cracked open a beer each.

“Akubekuhle,” Jagger toasted.

“Akubekuhle,” I repeated.

“No use beating around the bush. Waina’s in the hospital. They’re calling it a domestic dispute. Timmy Baxter, lifelong pacifist, flew off the handle, beat her within an inch of her life.” Jagger seized my arm, squeezed hard. “You can’t pursue this, Val. They see you with her and she *will* die. And Timmy’s dead. He drove his car into a concrete wall in front of Watergate Station, took out an old woman and her dog in the process.” Jagger finished his beer, crushed the can in his hand and threw it at the raccoon. “Want my recommendation?”

I felt wooden and my head felt moth-eaten. My ears were ringing. I could hear Reza’s strung-out voice, the words echoing throughout Gould’s mausoleum: *Welcome to the Bank of New York!*

“Val?”

“What did we do, Jag?”

“Val, listen to me. You have to leave. Go to Branson, Missouri. He handed me an envelope. You’ve got an account at Ozark Mountain Bank. You’re safe, in the clear, untouchable. But here’s the perspective of guys like Farrell and Ferris—they figure that all

the animals that come out of their barnyards have a shelf life, see? But there's no sense in martyring you. They figure if an asset grows a conscience they'll just put him to pasture. Who knows when he'll become useful again, right?"

"Waina. What happens to her?"

Jagger stood, wound up like a pitcher, threw a beer can toward home plate. "Fly Ball!" he shouted.

"Shut the fuck up!" someone yelled from the apartment complex next door.

"She gets a fresh start, Val. She'll spend a month or two with the white coats and be good-as-new."

"Good as new, huh" Val said, "And what about you—where do *you* go? I threw Jagger the last beer. He caught it, tossed it in the air, caught it again and opened it, foam spilling over his hand.

"Rumor has it I'm the great, great grandson of Shaka, the Zulu King. Apparently my great grandmother was one of his love-children. And according to my grandmother, my great grandmother was raped by the good Lord Palmer during the Anglo-Zulu War, making him great granddad. Touching, isn't it? I think so. Grandma was born in 1880 on a nice 'black spot' in KwaZulu but she was soon relocated to a Bantustan in Namibia—a 'black spot' by another name. Grandma was a looker, really white—all those Palmer genes, you know. Ever hear of Ruth Hayman? Course not. Black history ends with M.L.K. and the chick on the school bus. Grandma actually clerked for her. This is when she met Sakhile Mthunzi, an honest-to-god black man. They married, had three boys and one girl, my mother. Her name was Thandiwe. Are you yawning?"

"I'm listening. I suppose you're about to make a pretty important point."

"Yes! So when my mother comes of age, she meets a dashing political radical named Nobuntu Nomzamo. They had a nice run, made two babies and then Nomzamo got his hands and nose chopped off during the Namibian War of Independence. This was supposed to be a war against apartheid but most of the militia against whom my father was fighting with SWAPO³⁵ was backed by Harry Sternheimer of Ares Mines. And I have a picture—nothing that you'd want to put on a mantle—but it *is* spectacular!" Jagger

³⁵ SOUTH WEST AFRICA PEOPLE'S ORGANIZATION

was pacing back and forth, wringing his hands. “Back in great, great grand-pop’s day you couldn’t capture massacres on film. You had to draw or paint from memory and we know how accurate *that* is. ‘*You said there were how many dead, a thousand? I can’t draw that many. I’ll draw ten.*’ But during the Namibian War of Independence, everyone was a war correspondent—bullets and flashbulbs. And I have this photograph taken by a SWAPO photographer, a close friend of my father’s. And you know who’s in it? My father! Yeah! And a man, young, maybe 30, his right knee pressed into my father’s back, a bloody machete in his left hand and he’s waving into the camera. Waving, right, but not with his own hand. Oh, no. He’s waving with my father’s dismembered hand. *This* man...” Jagger reached into his shirt pocket, took out a black and white photograph, handed it to me. “*That* man stands to make a truly staggering fortune in...” he glanced at his watch, squinted. “Seven hours and fifteen minutes.”

“He and Gould, right?”

“My father’s friend gave that picture to me when I was seventeen. He said if I wanted to avenge my father, I’d have to do it from the inside. And that’s exactly what I’ve done.”



SEPTEMBER 11th 2001, 3:30 ^{AM}: Jagger dropped me off on the upper deck of a parking garage on the corner of 17th and U Street. “Roadmap in the glove box, a full tank of gas,” he said. “Understand everything I’ve told you?”

I didn’t. “You’re not adlibbing.”

“Spontaneity is an excuse, Ushomi. It’s for sots without a plan. Carrington’s expecting you. If I know her, she’ll be out on the front stoop waiting. She’s a real team-player.” Jagger leaned out the car window, extended his hand, and solemnly said, “Good luck, brother— I mean it. Carrington will keep you from pitching over the edge and she’ll make the introductions in Branson.”

“Jagger...” I started, but he was already rolling up the window, putting the car into gear. I watched him drive down the ramp and out of sight.



CARRINGTON: I slowed to a stop in front of a brownstone on Lanier Place. There was a light on in an upstairs window, movement behind a curtain. I thought about pulling into the alley but a vision of a butterfly in a jar, fluttering wildly, asphyxiated by ammonia convinced me to stay where I was, idling beside a black Volkswagen, a little alarm LED blinking in the front window. The light upstairs went out and moments later a form emerged from the front door. Carrington was tall, her thick head of curly blonde hair pulled away from her face, tied in a knot. She opened the car door, pushed her bags onto the back seat, sat down, and exhaled. “Listen, could you double back, stop at the Exxon? I need cigarettes.” I pulled into the alley, turned around, headed for the gas station. “So you’re the mercenary,” she said, twisting in her seat, looking me over.

“Jagger didn’t tell you that.”

“Nope, Farrell told me. Want to know his exact words? He said, and I quote, ‘*Ask him about the Srebrenica Massacre.*’ He said the genocide was attributed to a division of the VRS.³⁶ But you know what he said next, Val? He said that the massacre was ghost-written, that he could attribute the true authorship to one man: *you*. Anything you want to tell me?”

There was, but I wouldn’t. Not yet. “Get your cigarettes.”



THE ROAD TO BRANSON, 8:45 ^{AM}: We had been on the road for about five hours when we passed through Washington, PA. Carrington asked me to pull off the road: “Take this exit, pull off up ahead.” I rolled into a gas station on West Chestnut, stopped next to a pump. Carrington stubbed out her cigarette, closed the ashtray, and looked at her watch. I looked at the clock on the dash. It read 8:49 ^{AM}.

“You have a first name, Carrington?” I asked.

“I do. It’s Devon. But a lot of guys call me Shauna.” She put her right hand on my left shoulder, squeezed. “Val? Listen to me.” She put her left palm on my cheek, drew close, our noses almost touching, whispered, “Two cigarettes in an ashtray, my love and I in

³⁶ ARMY OF THE REPUBLIKA SRPSKA

a small café. Then a stranger came along, and everything went wrong. Now there are three cigarettes in the ashtray.”



SEPTEMBER 18th 2001, TUESDAY: ...*It feels as though my face is being poked with hot needles, my mouth filled with sulfur cake, my eyes branded by hot poker. There's a searing, white hot flash of light. The back of my head feels as though it is tightening, the scalp is shrinking, that my hair is being pulled out by the roots...*

Carrington: What happens next, Val?

Tyner: I'm on top of something. I can feel it collapsing, like a mattress with bad springs and my face is being rubbed against something smooth, something wet.

Carrington: What do you see?

Tyner: I don't. I—I smell metal, like a rusty tin roof or the bottom of an oil drum. And I'm being dragged through the air, held up by my neck. My feet are dragging, bumping on uneven wood planks...

Carrington: Good. Stop there, Val. You are not being dragged through the air. You do not smell metal. You are in the same room on a different day. It is a warm, spring afternoon. The windows are opened and a nice breeze blows through the house. You sit cross-legged on the floor, a storybook in your lap. Your mother is in the kitchen. You can hear her humming. She is baking a pie. Tell me what you see.

Tyner: It isn't a pie. She's canning something. I can smell it. She's canning strawberries. I can see berries on the counter, shortcake on the oven. She seems to float from one side of the kitchen to the other, her feet barely touching the ground. She's humming. I know the song. It's "Peace in the Valley." And she's humming the first stanza over and over again. The book in my lap is *When We Were Very Young*. Then she is sitting beside me, her legs curled up beneath her, her arm hidden behind her back. She has a smirk on her face. She says, 'Close your eyes.' I do. Then she says, 'Okay, open them?' And she has a little strawberry shortcake in her hand.

Val's voice broke. Carrington could see tears streaming down his face. She stubbed out a cigarette, rose from her seat and crossed the room to Val, stretched out on the bed, fully clothed, his feet bare. She lifted his right arm, took his pulse. She could see his eyes moving rapidly behind their lids. She placed her hand on his

shoulder and squeezed gently. “When you wake up, Val, you will remember. These are *your* memories. You own them. They are a part of who you are. When I snap my fingers, you will wake up.” Carrington raised her hand in front of his face, was about to snap, stopped. She sat on the bed beside Val and put her hand on his chest. Warm autumn afternoon light filtered through the motel curtains, settled on his face. “When you wake up, Val, you will trust me.” She snapped her fingers.



THE RIDDLE OF THE SPHINX: I was awake, lying on my side watching Carrington, asleep in the next bed. I hadn’t pegged her as a white coat. She was different, not a typical asset. I found it frustrating that I didn’t possess the language with which to describe her disposition. Later, with Carrington’s help, I would acquire the words that apparently came easily to others, words that enabled them to reinforce their identity, to form bonds. But on the morning in question, I was still at a loss. I had been taught to read situations, to react, not to interpret. And now I found myself trying to interpret this woman in the other bed, to decode her. I had lived in a world in which I took it for granted that memories are not formed before the age of eight, or ten if you were a girl. Soon I would ask Carrington about her childhood, about her mother and father. Would she tell me about running naked in the streets in the rain, or drawing with crayons on the living room wall? Maybe it was the answers of which I was afraid. I didn’t want to think she was just another one of Farrell’s tools, or Sprague’s. But wasn’t this Jagger’s plan—his handiwork? I reached into the air between our beds, imagined touching Carrington’s back, running my knuckles over her cheeks, smelling her hair. We were in a world apart, she and I.

Across the room stood the dead eye of the TV. I could turn it on, stare into the smoldering hole in Lower Manhattan. But I wouldn’t. The entire world really *was* a stage. In footage, over and over again, I had seen the efficiency with which the ballotechnic fusion devices worked, the astounding rate at which they were able to vaporize steel and atomize concrete. Invisible were the still-active 25 kHz TETRA arrays. And while the world had looked up, mesmerized, six tagged Mexican tractor trailers with Chinese drivers roared out of the basement of 4 WTC under cover of smoke and chaos, the axles red-hot and distressed from the weight of Gould’s booty.

I turned away from the dead TV, looked at Carrington. She was awake, her eyes open. She smiled, asked, “Which creature goes in the morning on four legs, at mid-day on two, and in the evening upon three, and the more legs it has, the weaker it is?”



“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Val. Welcome to the Crescent Theatre!” Teresa said.

“Teresa and I grew up together, Val. Our fathers were both Majors. We used to sit in the dirt at Kirtland, play with our dolls while jets screamed overhead. Idyllic childhood.” Carrington smiled and winked at Teresa.

“Well, make yourself at home, honey. I have to do my little emcee thing and then we can get a bottle, sit under the stage, talk the talk. Sound good? She gave me a hug, then Carrington. “He’s a little stiff, ain’t he? Don’t worry, Mr. Tyner, we’ll get you loosened up soon enough!”

We stood in the back near the bar and watched Teresa mount the stage, introduce an *‘up ‘n comer from Austin doin’ it Boxcar Willie style.’* “Spook central, Val. One in three in the audience is an asset of some persuasion or another. They come in droves, some on official business, and others on a hunch. They convince their families to go on a vacation: *‘How about the Ozarks this year?’* You can imagine the kids rolling their eyes, the exasperation on their wife’s face. *‘Yeah, honey! It’s Branson or bust!’*”

The kid from Austin, Luther Spell, strummed his guitar, launched into “Last Train to Heaven.”

*I'll ride that last train to heaven
On rails of solid gold
In a boxcar lined with satin
Where the nights are never cold*

I broke out into gooseflesh upon hearing the first stanza, started to sweat. Carrington took my arm, led me to an exit, down a hall with a plush carpet. We sat in an alcove on a black divan. Faux gas lamps flickered on the wall. “We’re going to talk. I’m taking you apart, Val—unmaking and remaking, but not by the book. I’m deprogramming you ... and in what better place—the work-over capital of the world. I could say I work for this person or that, but

it's meaningless. Who was the last puppet-master I talked to? Jagger. But does that mean this is *his* show? Who knows? But I won't work with the white coats anymore. I only deprogram. In fact, I'm one of a handful that can do it. You are a classic multiple. Trauma-based programming, honeycombed over and over again; used, refreshed; unmade, remade. I'm trying to give you some tools, new skill-sets, functions with which you can armor yourself from persuasion and assert your own identity. I've read your jacket. I know you were one of the Happy Hills animals." She took my hand. My palms were sweaty and my heart was racing. "I don't have to go on, Val. We can talk about this later."

"It's alright," I said, squeezing her hand.

"All of the Happy Hills kids were on a particular track. And it's not like Happy Hills disappeared. Even today, Happy Hills kids are on the same track: to become mercenaries. I know about your encounter with Whistler. She was a Fox Hollow girl, trauma-based also, but different track. They're all designed to self-destruct, to carry out suicide attacks, assassinations or to augment the experience of a mercenaries. They invariably have few skill-sets and short lives. Mercenaries are different. They don't self-destruct, but their programs tend to expire in terms of overall usefulness. The agency calls it 'end-of-life,' just like software, which is exactly what it is, in a sense. Ends up there might be more to a man than his program which is kind of disconcerting to a white coat."

"Why not just kill me?" Carrington took her hand back, stood up, leaned against a wall, and fiddled with one of her rings.

"They're working on it, Val. It's called Project Oedipus."

Down the hallway came Teresa. "Interrupting something?"

"Yes," replied Carrington, "And just in the nick of time!"



Teresa led us through a trap door at the end of the hall, down a metal ladder and into a padded low-ceilinged room. A table was pushed against the far wall and a reel-to-reel was set up. "Take a seat guys." She pointed to a pair of metal office chairs. "So, we all know who Chico Indelicato is, right?" We did. He was the lead singer of the popular 70s group Daybreak.

"Okay, I have this tape here and in a minute we're going to listen to it." She patted the reel-to-reel. "Chico is back in town, semi-retired. A lot of these guys either retired or died in '99. That was the

big change-over, or coup, or whatever you want to call it. People started to scrutinize the CVs on a lot of the top names in the entertainment industry, especially the country music machine, realized they were long-time assets and more specifically, agent's provocateurs for Project Hobo—familiar with that?"

We shook our heads.

"Okay, Project Hobo. In the mid 70s an MI6 officer named Lionel Hampton Taylor was tasked with liaising with the CIA in an effort to harmonize the Crown's brain-modification program with the CIA's. Apparently Taylor had some revolutionary ideas that had been effectively demonstrated in the laboratory but bigger sample sizes were required in order to determine their veracity. So the MI6 boffins listen to Taylor's proposal. He gets approval and comes to the States masquerading as a music agent. Hang on. I need to backtrack a little bit. Boring you?"

I pointed to bottles of water under the table.

"Be my guest," Teresa said. "Ever hear of super-learning? Sounds like a good thing, right? Helps a person absorb, retain and command large amounts of information in a short period of time. Well Taylor, building upon work by Georgi Lozanov, discovers that super-learning has a lot of unintended consequences, one of which had far-reaching implications: the impairment of the prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain responsible for critical thinking. Well, not the actual super-learning itself, that's an effect, but the method whereby which super-learning is induced. Once induced, the brain is like a big black hole, sucking in information indiscriminately—no filter, per se. So what a wonderful means by which to persuade people—millions of people. Taylor just needed a vehicle and it just so happens he had his breakthrough in '76 in the person of Lecil Travis Martin, better known as Boxcar Willie. Taylor sold himself to Martin as a music agent, had a 'can't-lose' formula to make him a star. '*I just need to take you back to England with me, get you into one of my test-tubes.*' Martin agreed and the rest is history. Voila! Superstar! So what was Taylor *doing*, exactly? He just had to sequester Martin at Chatham House, teach him to play at a slightly different tempo and sing or speak at a slightly different cadence. The rest was up to the people that wrote the lyrics. Upon his return to the states, Boxcar Willie exploded onto the scene. There was something different about him, but no one could put their finger on it. But something fairly miraculous was happening: super-learning was

induced in the listener but at the same time, their ability to think critically about the lyrics—the imagery and messages—was suspended. Parts of the prefrontal cortex went to sleep. Don't *you* fall asleep, Val. You're here in Branson for an education, after all. Pinch him, Devon!"

"I'm listening to every word—baited breath!" I said.

"Good, because this methodology began to spread like wildfire. Spooks started recruiting would-be country singers right out of the service. They'd get their Chatham House primer. Someone else would stuff lyrics into their hands. '*Sing it how we taught you,*' they'd say. These were the star-makers, the spooks from MI6 and the CIA. And the public was manipulated into the largest mind-control experiment ever embarked upon. And to everyone's delight, it worked. But there were and are long-term consequences and I guess it was good news to the spooks and white coats. The prefrontal cortex, after regular exposure to the super-learning formula, actually atrophies. Critical thinking is effectively suspended. Now here's the tape, maybe the only one left in existence. It really drives home the point." She flipped a switch and the reels began to turn:

The sound of tape hiss and chairs scraping on the floor:

"Kill the god damn lights!"

"Lewis! Put the fucking bottle down."

Glass broke in the background and someone said: '*Shit!*'

"Lewis!"

"For fuck's sake, Chico, just take it easy. Sit down. Here, have one of these."

"They're going to burn us. Not you, maybe, with your fucking telethon, but a lot of us. We're finished..."

"You had a good run, Chico. Nothing to stick up your nose at."

"If you knew the things I did for those bastards-things I did on the Asian tour. If my wife knew! Hand me the bottle. I must have-not just me-Martin and Miller and me-we must have dusted thirty, forty for those rats. Hey, hey, turn up the lights, there's someone up in that balcony!"

The sound of running feet. The tape cuts out.

“You can read into that any way you want, but that’s the way business has been done and that’s the way it is still being done. I just think the company got sick of country music, maybe moved on to televangelists. Mark my words, kiddies.”



“Listen kids, *hear that?*” asked Teresa.

“Hear what?” asked Carrington.

“*Exactly.* That’s the equivalent of dead air on the radio. Spell must’ve finished his set. Doesn’t sound like he scored a big rapport with the audience. It’s been dead the last couple of weeks, anyway. I’m going to go up, schmooze with customers, and lock up. I’ve got a fiddler coming in to audition. If it works out, he’ll play the intermezzo on variety night. Why don’t you two stay, have a couple drinks.”

The fiddler was Croatian, from Zagreb, middle-aged with a bushy moustache, thick eyebrows, and gaunt face. Teresa led him up to the stage, offered him a stool, “Ja preferirati to stajanje.” Teresa looked at us, shrugged.

“He’s going to stand,” I said, lifting my glass to the fiddler. He nodded, showed me a mouth full of big, white teeth.

“Croatian, eh,” Carrington remarked, “That’s a twist in the tale.”

“Hrvatski,” I said. “And I’m not sure this tale is so twisted, after all. I know what he’s going to play, although I’m not sure how.” The Croat was holding the fiddle to his head, plucking the strings, twisting the pegs. “He’s going to play Gluck’s “Melody” from *Orpheus ed Euridice.*”

“And you know this *how?*” Carrington asked, waving her glass in the air, trying to get the attention of the bartender who was wiping down tables.

Teresa appeared, swiped the glass out of Carrington’s hand. “I’ll just bring the bottle over, *bonne idée?*”

Teresa returned with a bottle of whiskey and three new glasses filled with ice. She sat between us, facing the stage. “What did I miss? And by the way, if I hire him, this guy’s got to have the fiddle tuned *before* he gets on stage.” She chuckled, opened the bottle, took a swig, swallowed, handed me the bottle. I filled the glasses.

“Hvala vam,” the Croat said, pointing to the stool, but he didn’t sit. He began playing.

“In June of ‘93,” I said, “I started tracking Ratko Mladić, the Serbian General. It wasn’t difficult. He and former assistant Secretary of Defense Dick Stone did a lot of hobnobbing—fishing excursions, lavish dinners, so they were highly visible. There was a retreat in the Jahorina range to which Mladić, Stone, Sir John Starr, Rupert Mitterrand and others spent days—busloads of commanders and officers from UNPROFOR.”³⁷ I wasn’t supposed to pop my head above the weeds and for the most part, I didn’t. But I had a lot of latitude and no one on the ground to which I had to report. Bosnia was crawling with MI6 and SVR³⁸—you couldn’t tell them apart. There was only one other company asset on the ground of which I was aware: Waina Punavuori. By 1995, we were both operating out of Srebrenica. Mladić was no longer on my radar. Punavuori was watching the silver and gold mines and I was monitoring the UNPROFOR, which were guarding choke-points in the north and south of the Srebrenica Valley. Around the 4th or 5th of July ‘95, the UNPROFOR started abandoning posts, while north of Srebrenica, Mladić’s troops were amassing. In the meantime, UNPROFOR left behind a tiny Dutch contingent and a handful of tanks.” My hands were shaking. I poured another whiskey, closed my eyes, and listened to the Croat play.

On the 6th of July, early, I was heading south on a ridge west of Srebrenica, trying to get to Waina. The shelling had already begun and the sound of explosions was echoing around the valley. Already I had heard several sonic booms, jets barreling toward their strike zones. A mortar landed about twenty meters ahead of the jeep, sending shrapnel through the radiator. The engine cut. I tried to radio ahead to Srebrenica Town, got static, started running on foot. Paratroopers started falling from the sky, a few at first, and then dozens. They’d land, shed their parachutes and fire into nearby buildings, barns, houses, chicken coops. I had never felt the air so heavy with lead. I was on my stomach and the ground was rumbling—you could hear screams through the earth.

“What was staggering was the coordination. It would have required detailed planning. There had been no VRS presence on the ground, at least nothing in uniform. But MI6 and SVR were ubiquitous.”

I rolled to the tree line. The paratroopers were raining down in droves—landing in the treetops. They would call for help and other paratroopers

³⁷ UNITED NATIONS PROTECTION FORCE

³⁸ SLUZHBA VNESHNEY RAZVEDKI (FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE SERVICE—RUSSIA)

would shoot them. Roiling amber clouds rose from the valley floor, clouds dyed by fire and blood.

“A bullet passed through my neck.” I pulled down the collar of my shirt, revealed the scar. Carrington’s eyes were wide. Teresa’s head was bowed. The Croat was no longer playing. He was sitting on the edge of the stage, listening. “I headed in the direction from which I heard cows lowing. There were two cottages. In one a fire had been started and a Scorpion dressed in combat black was dragging a woman by her hair into a garden—”

“What’s a Scorpion?” Teresa asked.

“They were a paramilitary organization closely allied with the VRS. Saša Cvjetan, one of the group’s leaders, was another hanger-on at Mladić and Stone’s mountain parties.” I rattled the ice in my glass, looked over at the Croat. His eyes were warm, damp. I continued, “There was a small phalanx—part Scorpion, part VRS—flanking the hill that rose above the cottages. They were setting up mortars and rocket launchers. In the garden, the woman was screaming. A man, burning, ran out of the cottage. The Scorpion in the garden shot him in the head. I took the opportunity to lunge at him from the tree-line. I snapped his neck, lay his body on top of the woman, and told her not to move. I went back to the tree-line with the Scorpion’s gun, fired once into the air, and drew troops away from the hill. One moment I was at the tree-line, the next on the hill, driving a soldier’s head into the mortar’s pedestal. I fired three times, six, began to lose count, and was conscious of the air ionizing every time I fired. I remember spraying the tree-line with a sub-machine gun, dry firing, and passing out where I stood.”

I woke up in a root cellar. There was a young couple huddled in a corner, an elderly man on the steps and chickens were pecking at the dirt floor. The earth was still shaking and mortar from the brick walls was coming loose. Days passed like that. Every few hours a large man with a thick beard would bring a pail of water, change the bandage on my neck. No one slept.

“And finally the world grew quiet again. No one dared speak or move. The first sound we heard was a fiddle—a fiddle playing Gluck’s “Melody.” When the playing stopped, we came to life. I put my arm around the elderly man, helped him to the top of the stairs. The young couple followed. It was a small cottage. There was a thick layer of dust on everything and the walls were riddled with bullets. There was a large blood stain on the kitchen floor and on the kitchen table sat the fiddle. The house was empty.”

The Croat hopped off the stage, approached our table, handed me an envelope, and said in perfect English, “There are no coincidences, my friend.” He squeezed my shoulder, left with his fiddle.



We walked down 76, back to the motel. Neither of us spoke. Carrington took a shower and I flopped on the bed. We turned out the lights, pretended to sleep. An hour passed, maybe two. I turned on the lamp between the beds. We both sat up. “She’s Euridice. Waina is my Euridice.”

“Apparently I am earning my stripes,” Carrington replied.

“Earning your—” I started.

“My stripes, yes. You’re starting to put the pieces back together, Val. That’s my job, to restore some kind of semblance of unity in that brain of yours.”

“So you knew the fiddler?”

“I knew the fiddler. *Teresa* knew the fiddler. He was Waina’s contact in Srebrenica and also a VEVAK³⁹ asset. You were watching Mladić and Waina had Andelko, the fiddler, watch *you*. She thought you were being reckless and didn’t want you to get hurt. You know what we called the two of you behind your backs: *Orpheus and Eurydice*. But you were shattered in Bosnia. Your programming had no defenses against that. You dissociated and left a large piece of your memory in that massacre. And had it not been for Waina and Jagger, you would have been summarily disposed of. For so-called ‘time-served’ you were issued the very rarely honored ‘shelter-status.’ Jagger was your handler in Bosnia and he became your keeper here in the States. You spent five freaking years with your feet up on a desk in a Western Union! But you never got an itch. Until someone decided to put you back in the house of mirrors, to reactivate you, so they sicked a Fox Hollow girl on you. Chinks in your precious head’s armor started to appear. Then you were re-paired with Waina, a match against which you would have no defenses, even if you couldn’t remember why.”

“And you know this how?”

“I’m Jagger’s right hand, Val. Maybe part of his left, too. No, he’d notice that. But it started to get away from him late last year. When

³⁹ MINISTRY OF INTELLIGENCE AND NATIONAL SECURITY OF IRAN

they gave him Whistler's file, he knew the company was going to use you and burn you. But not *just* you. Dozens of sleepers and shelter-stats were woken up last spring, ordered to New York. Jagger lured half a dozen agents from SASS,⁴⁰ asked them to monitor Reza and more importantly, you. On September 10th, Jagger beat six mercenaries to the Hampshire by ten minutes."

It was enough. I reached over, turned out the lamp, pulled the blankets to my chin and was asleep in seconds.



OCTOBER 8th 2001, 8:00 AM: "YOU'RE *listening to KRZK 106.3 FM and we're heading up the hour with an oldie but a goody from one of our very own. That's right. You guessed it. Boxcar Willie. Here it is, "Song of Songs."* Well don't that just say it all?"

*How I love that old melody they are playing,
I've heard it in so many different songs.
It's made stars of country music singers,
And the tune just keeps playing on.*

"Well, if that's not an indictment of the super-learning methodology, I don't know what is." Carrington threw the blankets off the bed, sat up, stretched her arms, and topped the performance off with a yawn.

I was sitting at the round Formica table by the window, looking over a week-old newspaper. "Listen, boss, you think we're done here—with Branson?"

"Val," Carrington said, reaching over to the nightstand, turning off the radio. "I do believe we are."



THREE CIGARETTES: I dropped Carrington off at the brownstone on Lanier. Before getting out of the car, she leaned over, her lips inches from my ear, whispered, "It sucks when there are three cigarettes in the ashtray." She got out with her bags, closed the door, and didn't look back.

I drove to White Wall Cleaners on MacArthur Blvd. I made a quick note on the back of an envelope, stuffed it in the breast

⁴⁰ SOUTH AFRICAN SECRET SERVICE

pocket of a shirt, and went into the cleaners. On a large TV over the counter Cattle Queen of Montana was playing. “Val, *long time*. Check it out,” Rex Scholl said in a faint German accent, pointing at the screen, “Reagan plays a hired gun. Bringing me your dirties?”

“Just a shirt,” I said.

Rex took the shirt, felt in the pocket, withdrew the note. “Jeez, what were you doing, rolling around in the mud? I’ll see what I can do. If Rex can’t clean it, no one can.” Rex winked, extended his hand. I shook it.

“Thanks buddy,” I said.

Now it was just a matter of time.



OCTOBER 11th 2001, KALORAMA PARK: *“Is this what you expected?” Waina asked.*

“No, I—I...”

“It’s okay. Don’t say anything.” She wrapped her arms around me, pulled the sheet over our heads. In the distance I could hear someone play a tamburica. “Let me tell you a story, see if you can remember. I was eleven and you were nine. It was late August. I had a calendar that hung over my bed, and its pages would get rifled by the breeze from the window—the window that would open exactly two inches, no more. And it was through these two inches that I watched the world and breathed in the smells of summer—grass cuttings, pollen. If I pulled the bed along the length of the window, lay sideways, pressed my head into the gap, I could watch a bird build its nest in one of the dormitory eaves. For several months I watched her nest grow. She built it with sticks and mud, pieces of newspaper, twisty-ties, aluminum foil. One evening, three things happened. I had pushed the bed along the window in order to check on the bird. I was straining and squinting to see if the bird had added to her nest and she had. She had tacked a torn piece of ruled notebook paper to its side and on it was printed: ‘With Love, Ad—’ and the rest of the name was cut off. It could have been ‘Adam’ or ‘Adrienne.’ And a moment later I looked down into the courtyard and you know who I saw? You! You were daydreaming. I thought you were looking up into a tree, or watching a plane cross the sky, but then you smiled and I realized you were smiling at me. Then behind you I could see one of the farmers—we actually used to think of them as farmers—run for you with a nightstick. I remember screaming, “NOOOOOOO!” Then I could hear boots running down the hallway, keys in the door. That night they nailed my window shut. I remember feeling so confused. I was so worried about what they might have done to you, but then I kept thinking about the way you had smiled

at me. While they were nailing my window shut, I realized that this little girl fell in love with this little boy." She tapped my heart with her finger.

"Val!" I woke with a start, the Sun splintered by naked branches.

"Val!" I saw my reflection in a pair of mirrored sunglasses.

"Jagger, *Jesus*, you scared the hell out of me. What are you doing with a basketball?"

"Don't worry. Follow me." I followed him across the park to the basketball court. He started dribbling.

"I don't think we're dressed for this."

Still dribbling, "Come a little closer. If there are directional mics on us, this will interfere with their reception. And that Carrington, she can do a lot of things but she obviously doesn't cook. You look like a scarecrow."

"Waina..."

"Rex gave me your note, Val. She's okay, safe, recovering. She's not at Georgetown University anymore. They transferred her to the Naval Hospital and that's proof-positive they're trying to bait you. Or even me. Here, take this." He tossed me the ball. "But keep dribbling, nice and easy. A basket every now and again wouldn't hurt." He dug around inside of his jacket, pulled out a manila envelope.

"Just like old times," I said.

"Just." He opened the envelope, pulled out several glossy photographs. "I have SASS guys that have been glued to Sternheimer's people in Johannesburg and New York. There were six but now I've only got five. One actually went into 2 WTC. I have another team that set up surveillance across from 3900 Webster in the Bronx. They were taping night and day." A grin spread across Jagger's face. "Sternheimer and Gould got their payday. It's all on tape. One semi arrived every 30 minutes throughout the morning and early afternoon on September 11th. They'd arrive, unload and sprint for the expressway: a total of six trucks. My people followed them as far as Hackensack then let them go their merry way." He handed me the glossies. They were close-ups of the semis. Their cargo was being unloaded by heavy-duty lift trucks and carried into 3900, the warehouse from which tunnels extended to the mausoleums in Woodlawn Cemetery. "Look here." Jagger flipped through the photographs, pointed. "Here, recognize these guys?" I didn't have to squint to see that the men directing traffic at the warehouse were Sprague and Reza.

“What about mystery-man?” Jagger pointed to a third man, leaning into a truck cab, looking back in the direction of the camera.

“No name. But he was in the limo the night I met Whistler. He didn’t talk.”

“Drive to this address.” Jagger handed me a card. “Park in the driveway. It’s a safe-house but you won’t be the only guest. Tomorrow we get down to brass tacks. Oh—and the owners are going to *feed* you.” Jagger patted my belly, “Skin and bones, Ushomi!”

He started to walk away. When I stopped dribbling the basketball, he turned around. “I want to do it your way, Jagger,” I started. “But I have to see her. Things have changed. Carrington—she gave me—she...”

“She gave you back some memories. That’s what she does. Ever see the cross-section of a honeycomb? That’s you, Val. And as painful as it is to hear, that’s Waina, too. You’ve got a long—”

“Don’t!” I shouted, throwing the basketball, which came to rest in the grass. “I *know*, man. Don’t think I don’t know what you’ve done—that I don’t appreciate it. I do. I don’t know why you did the things you did—why you took the risks. But I have these memories. Maybe they’re mine and maybe they aren’t. Only, there are a few memories about which I have a feeling—memories that I know are mine, that I really own. Waina is one of them.” I approached Jagger, took his arm. “I know of what I am capable as well as you do and I know you want to use that, but I also know you weren’t just saving me up to serve your vengeance. I’m going to her, Jag. *Now*. Then I agree to do things your way, to the letter.”

“You’ve got a grip, brother.” Jagger peeled my hand away from his arm. “It doesn’t matter what I say, does it?” He tucked the manila envelope back into his jacket, pointed across the street at a red van on the side of which was printed in block letters: WHITE WALL CLEANERS. Rex sat at the wheel reading a magazine. “What’d I say at the baseball diamond? ‘*Spontaneity is for sots without a plan.*’ Yeah—so do what you have to do. That red van will be behind you. Just be at *that* address,” he pointed to the pocket in which I placed the card, “by morning.” Jagger patted his chest, “This envelope? It’ll keep you from getting killed outright, but accidents happen all the time. I used to think it was just one man with cloven hooves. Ends up there are hundreds.”



At the reception desk I asked for Waina Punavuori. The receptionist took a long look at me, picked up a telephone, pressed a button, listened. She hung up, took a pen out from behind her ear, set it down. “Just a sec,” she said. She went into an anteroom, picked up another phone, turned her back to the window through which I was watching her. She came back. “Mr. Tyner?”

“Yeah,” I said.

“Elevator bank on the left,” She pointed with her pen, “Second floor. This gentleman will accompany you.” A staff sergeant appeared beside me, nodded to the receptionist.

I followed the staff sergeant out of the elevator and down a brightly lit hallway. It was quiet. The only sound the squeak of his spit-shined shoes. “Through here,” he said, taking a seat outside a doorway. He took off his hat, put it in his lap.

“That’s it?” I asked.

“Go on in.” The staff sergeant was young, hard and expressionless.

I took a deep breath, entered the room. There were two beds, only one occupied. Waina was lying next to the window, sleeping. The machines to which she was attached beeped rhythmically. I pulled a chair to her bedside, sat, took her hand. There were lacerations along the palm and a fingernail was missing. I placed her knuckles on my lips, kissed them. Her lip had been split and her eyes were black, but not swollen. I reached for her face. Someone cleared his throat. I turned and a man in a white coat stood at the foot of the bed.

“She’s down for the count, Val: Barb-coma. He started to bang on the metal rail at the foot of the bed with his clipboard. “She’s just idling.” He stopped the banging, cocked his head to the side, let out a sigh. “It’s a pleasure Mr. Tyner. I don’t think we’ve met formally. Dr. Durand.” He offered his hand.

That voice. I know that voice, I thought. I didn’t shake his hand. “It’s going to be a long recovery, Mr. Tyner. She could use all the support she can get, obviously, but this...” he gestured to Waina. “This could last a long, long time. She’s losing weight, maybe her wits, too. You mind?” Durand grabbed a chair, dragged it to the side of the bed. “We’re all family, right?” He patted Waina’s blanketed leg. “What do you do when an investment goes bad?”

You dump it, right? Move on to the next one, hope it appreciates. But I don't believe in focused investments. I like to spread my risk around. Now, as it happens, I have investments all over the world. Some are appreciating and some just seem to go sideways. A few, once winners, have turned into grave losses. A good businessman would just pull the plug, chalk it up to experience." Durand drew near, rested the clipboard on my knee, lowered his voice, "But something's preventing me from selling out a couple of my losses. Can you guess what that might be?"

I could feel Waina's fingers curl around my hand, gently squeeze.

"God damn it, Tyner! Do you know how much time and energy we dumped into the Happy Hills kids? Years! We built you up, piece by piece, layer upon layer, pruned here, and trimmed there. It wasn't an exact science but it was pretty damn close. You were a prodigal son. You made me so proud. So imagine my disappointment when I hear it only took a couple of explosions to tear down everything I built up. You were an embarrassment—I wanted to bury you alive, film it, tape your agony, and show it to my children as an object lesson. But then I had a revelation. Yes, Bosnia walled of your programming, but it also produced a clean slate—you were putty. Even Jagger knew, but what could he do but pace back and forth like a German Shepherd, tongue lolling out of his mouth. So we put you back to work," Durand got up, went to the window, "Light, dry work. And you weren't the only one. It ends up lots of assets, many of them Happy Hills kids, are coming apart—the center doesn't hold and all that crap." He went to the far side of Waina's bed, took her pulse. Know what a shooting gallery is? Of course you do. Do you remember *the* shooting gallery?" Durand walked across the room, leaned out into the hallway, sent the staff sergeant away. He closed the door, came back to Waina's side. "You don't remember, do you? How about this: You answer a question and I'll tell you about the shooting gallery. Ready?"

I could hear Carrington's voice in my head: "*I'm taking you apart, Val—unmaking and remaking, but not by the book. I'm deprogramming you.*"

"Val!" Durand shouted. I ignored him. I was missing something—*knew* I was missing something.

"*Why not just kill me?*"

"*They're working on it, Val. It's called Project Oedipus.*"

"Val!"

I looked up at Durand. "I'm ready," I said.

In a low voice, he asked, "What is the answer to *The Riddle of the Sphinx*?"

"It's a Man," I said. "He crawls on all fours as a kid. He grows up and walks on two legs. He gets old, walks with a walker."

"A walker?" asked Durand.

"Or a cane..." And no sooner was the word out of my mouth than Waina's body began to shake. Her hand seized my wrist. Her body contracted and her back arched. "Get someone!" I yelled. I ran for the door, bolted into the hallway. "Somebody, I need help!" The floor was deserted. The nurse's station was empty. I ran back to Waina's room. Durand was gone. An alarm on Waina's EKG was blaring. I tried the phone, but it was dead. I peeled the oxygen tubes from her nose, disconnected her IV drips, picked her up, carried her into the hallway, and ran toward the elevator bank. Her body was still convulsing, foam emerging from her mouth. There was a ding and an elevator opened. I hit the lobby button, but the doors didn't close. "Close, God damn it!" I yelled. They slid closed and the elevator shook to life, descended. Waina's convulsions had stopped and her body grew limp. The doors opened into the lobby. "Someone help us!" A pair of doctors at the reception area rushed over.

"Put her down! Stand back!"

"It was Durand!" I yelled. "Durand did this!"



The address on the card was three blocks east of the Western Union. I passed the old front operation, saw that the windows were still boarded up. I pulled into a driveway on Keokee Street in Adelphi. The red van paused in front of the house and I waved Rex on. He gave me the thumbs-up. At the door I was greeted by Nobuntu Nomzamo Jr. and his wife.



The WHITE WALL CLEANERS truck arrived early the next morning, Rex and Jagger in the front. Rex opened the sliding door and four men climbed out. Nomzamo led the men into the living room. He had brought in several collapsible chairs from the garage. “Val, I’d like you to meet Bheka Kaleni, my father’s best friend,” Jagger said. I shook his hand. He was tall, slender, with graying hair and a closely cropped beard. “And these are our men from SASS.” I shook each of their hands and we all sat. Jabulile, Nobuntu’s wife, brought in a pitcher of water, a stainless steel thermos of coffee and a tray of glasses and cups, then took a seat herself. Jagger took me aside. “Waina’s okay?”

“She’s stable.”

“Good,” he said. “Like I said, accidents happen all the time.”

“But this wasn’t an accident, Jag. It was *me*. I did this to her.”

“No, Val. Someone got to Carrington, probably one of Sprague’s white coats. It’s not her fault—she’s probably completely unaware. But that’s what Project Oedipus is—seeding cues and suggestions among programmed assets. Upon hearing the suggestion, or question—in this case, *The Riddle of the Sphinx*—the answer triggers a self-destruct command in the target. Waina was the target. It’s what they call a clean assassination. There were places called shooting galleries all over the country where Project Oedipus was developed. They were programming kids to trigger a self-destruct mechanism in other kids. Happy Hills had one of the pilot programs. You and Waina have been carrying around *The Riddle of the Sphinx* for most of your lives, like a ticking time-bomb. I’m glad she’s alright, Val. Now it’s time to right the balance—to do the good work.”

Jagger took off his sunglasses, put them on a table. “Well, gentleman, and *lady*,” he winked at Jabulile, “this is a historic meeting.” We listened, rapt, as Jagger revealed his master plan.

“If knowledge is dependent upon the triumvirate—truth, belief & justification—and if our beliefs are based upon evidence of questionable provenance, then the breadth of what we can know is limited.”

—George Irwin

PART THREE: *TRANSLATION*

OCTOBER 24th 2001, SPARROW’S POINT, HATHAWAY ISLAND: “Val, I don’t know what to say.” Carrington had tears in her eyes. “I would never...”

I held her face in my hands, wiped her tears with my thumbs, “Devon, I know. She’s going to be alright. No matter what happens...”

“You’re calling me ‘Devon,’” she said.

“Hate it?”

“Not sure yet,” she said, wiping her face with the cuff of her sweater. “But I’m in, Val. And you trust Jagger?” she asked, fishing in her pocket for a pack of cigarettes.

Jagger was kneeling beneath a tractor trailer wearing a welder’s mask. Sparks were flying as the undercarriage of the trailer was reinforced with steel beams. Three more tractor trailers sat in a row in the Sparrow’s Point warehouse. “Yes, I do. Do you remember Karla Dietrich?”

She nodded, “Flight 77.”

“She was an informant, or at least that’s what we called her—it was really information-sharing. We were meeting pretty regularly early in the year. The last time we met—not the last time I saw her, but the last time we met—I gave her a message. She read it, crumpled it up and put it in her pocket. Then she told me something:

“Are you familiar with crab spiders, Val?” she asked.

I wasn’t.

“They don’t weave webs,” she said. “They blend in with their environment, sometimes change colors and surprise their prey. It’s our biggest mistake, imagining there’s some big web out there, a big King Spider sitting in the middle. No, our enemies are invisible. They pounce, swallow us whole and creep back into the shadows. How do you defeat something like that?”

“I didn’t have an answer.” I took a step in Jagger’s direction, “But I think *he* does.



BELTWAY-SEGUE: “I never thought I’d be a tomb raider,” Jagger said. We were doing a lap of the beltway, talking over last-minute details.

“You and me both, Jag.”

Jagger adjusted his sunglasses, consulted the side-view mirror, changed lanes, and sped up. “I took what they gave me, Val. I had to stay a few steps ahead of the brass and ‘crats. You were thirty-two when they assigned me to you. McShain was Deputy Director then, also an inside man. We were fairly close. Then he was cut loose, replaced by Farrell. The first time I met Farrell, he asked me to bring his car around. And you know what? *I did*. The long view, right? I had to take the long view, suck it up. Anyway, I knew where you’d come from, your history, your programming and it represented just about everything that was evil in man—everything I detested. There was no way I was going to put you at risk, so I figure, why not Srebrenica? It was a designated Pink Zone, wasn’t supposed to see action. You were also in love, about to get married—”

“Married?”

Jagger tacked right into the slow lane, cracked his window an inch and lit a cigarette. “Yeah, Bosnia was a god-forsaken mess, but you lovebirds had this quaint little refuge in the Srebrenica Valley. Nothing happened there. And that was the point. If Srebrenica hadn’t been betrayed by UNPROFOR, you would have been married right there. But they wanted the mines—Dick Stone, Farrell, even the bastard at 1600. They blitzed, scorched everything in their path, secured the mines, and got their gold. And how is it that a man like Ratko Mladić can just go underground? Trust me, he’s living the good life somewhere. He’s been rewarded. I’m sorry, Val. I truly am. I’m trying to make it right—I’m doing something for me and I’m doing something for you. We’re going to hit them where it hurts!”



OPERATION INANNA: “I think we’re prepared for most of the unknowns, except for the unknowns we can’t anticipate. Everything should be pretty straight-forward—try not to second-guess yourselves: Two teams, two trucks each, thirty minute intervals. We’re going to make happen with four trucks what they did with six—fewer baskets. No risk no glory. I really don’t know what to expect in the tunnels, so I want to work in the dark if we can’t flush them. If we’re swarmed with hornets, kill the power to everything, use thermal imaging. It’s a bastard, but I want the advantage—Moscow Rules. Four trucks, four routes south, no radios.” Jagger adjusted his sunglasses, scratched the top of his head. “Uh, okay, what will the security look like? Who knows. One thing is for certain: no one is going to call the cops. There’s a good chance it turns into *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral*. Val and I will do a quick sweep, subdue anything we can without kicking up dust. And I can’t emphasize this enough: *Speed!* We’re looting the looters.”



TWICE ON THE PIPE: It was early in the evening on October 30th. Carrington and I were walking down Mac Questen Parkway, an industrial strip in Mt. Vernon, making our way to the Blue Mirror Bar. “Surreal, isn’t it?” she said. “I really did have a nice childhood and I know how precious that is, how important. And Teresa and I really *did* play with our dolls in the dirt. We’d come home, our stockings ripped, our faces dirt-streaked, and our mothers would clean us up, give us baths. How do you end up leading a life like this?” We made it to the Blue Mirror. I opened the door, let Carrington slide in. “Over here,” she said. We sat at a table opposite the bar. A waitress came over, took our order. She came back with the drinks as Carrington was putting a cigarette in her mouth.”

“You can smoke on the back patio.”

Carrington put her cigarette away, her hand shaking. “Look. We got a good start back in Branson. And if for some reason—” Her voice cracked. “If for some reason I’m not around to help you, Val, you need to keep working, get your mind and life back. Waina, too. You both have a long, hard road ahead of you, but it won’t be so hard if you’re together.” Carrington took a long pull on her beer.

“Look around. All the things that go on under people’s noses.” A jukebox in the corner roared to life. Dawn’s “Knock Three Times” began.

*I love you
 Oh my darling
 Knock three times on the ceiling if you want me
 Twice on the pipe if the answer is no*

“Twice on the pipe, right partner?” Carrington asked. She polished off the beer, waved the bottle in the air, trying to get the attention of the bartender.

“Let *me*, sweetheart.” I took her bottle, kissed her on the cheek, headed for the bar. Carrington took a cigarette out of her pack, lit it, leaned back in her seat and smiled.



OCTOBER 31st 2001, 7:00 ^{AM}: “Ready, Ushomi?”

“Ready,” I said.

“Ready, Carrington?”

“Born that way, boss.” Carrington had her hair pulled into a knot on the back of her head, a cigarette perched behind her ear.

Jagger put the semi in gear, pulled out of the yard on Bradley, turned onto Mac Questen. “Famous last words, prayers, anything? As soon as we hit Bronx River Road, we’re past the point-of-no-return. Carrington, flip the latch on my holster.”

Carrington slammed a magazine into her Heckler & Koch. “Could you grab me one of those?” I handed her an extra magazine. She put it in her jacket pocket. Jagger put his hand on her knee. She leaned over and whispered something in his ear. He nodded, but his face betrayed no emotion.

A dense fog was rolling off Woodlawn Cemetery, tendrils crawling over Webster Ave. Jagger radioed the second truck. “Half a klick. I’m going to ram the fence. Pick up a red light or two—I need to back the rig up before you follow on.”

A ‘10-4’ squawked from the radio. “Here we go!” Jagger downshifted, pulled across the highway and rammed the gate. The padlock and chain snapped like fishing line. Jagger pumped the breaks, slowed, turned into a wide arc. “Watch the mirrors! Watch the mirrors!”

“*Movement*,” I said.

“Get out, pepper the building. We’re fucked if I lose any tires!” I leapt from the cab, rolled behind a stack of railroad ties. A few rounds started to fly in my direction, searing the air. That was my cue. I squatted, dove to the far end of the ties, fired toward the building. Two soldiers with CAR-15s had taken a knee and were aiming for the semi’s cab. I aimed, took one in the shoulder, sending him flying against the building. As the second turned toward my position, I bore a hole in his knee. I stayed low to the ground, did a monkey-walk to the injured soldiers, removed my tranquilizer gun from its holster and shot them both in the neck. I signaled Jagger and he began to back up. The second truck was pulling into the lot. I peered through a pane of glass into the warehouse, looked for movement. Carrington was out of the cab and against the wall next to me, her gun raised. I raised four fingers. She acknowledged me with a nod. Jagger was parked and running to the back of the trailer. He knocked and the trailer opened. Two members of SASS dropped out, pulling down and securing a ramp. “It’s tight, Jag. Four inside, probably more!”

“Alright, Devon. Secure the trucks, prepare the forklifts, and get them in a tight row. On my mark, we’re driving through this door.” The second truck was in position, the ramp down and the SASS guys were backing forklifts out and into position.

I pointed to the transformer. Jagger nodded, said, “Let’s do our sweep first. I’d hate to run into some kind of magnetic dead-bolt that required power.”

“Gotcha,” I said. I took a magazine out of my pocket, tucked it in my waist.

One of the SASS officers was in a forklift. He gave us the thumbs-up. “Devon—once he’s in lay down cover fire, open up a hole. We’ll use the lift as a shield. Go!”

The officer threw the forklift into gear, raised its spikes and rammed the roll-up door. It crumpled like tin-foil and all hell broke loose. The driver was dead before he passed through the door, falling over the controls. The forklift veered left, came to a rest against the wall. I felt Jagger’s hand on my back and I dove through the breach, aiming in the direction from which the gunfire had come. Like in Srebrenica, I could smell the air charge with electrons and ionize. There were five soldiers, but they weren’t covering each other. I rolled and fired, rolled and fired, watching for flashes. The

room was quickly filling with smoke. I could see Jagger push through the breach, tracer-fire tracking him. I rolled onto my back, spotted the gunman on a catwalk, took him on the chin. I heard Jagger yell "Grab it!" And I lay flat, kissing the concrete. I heard a whoosh over my head, saw the grenade connect with a railing across the room, bounce toward three soldiers, then explode. The roar was deafening and a wall of hot air felt like it was skinning me. A bullet grazed my back, from my right shoulder to my left hip. I twisted, aimed and fired, saw a soldier spin in the air, hit the ground. Jagger was up and running, "Go, go, go!" I led him to the ramp from which Reza and I had emerged. We flanked the wall, crept down, our knees bent. The fluorescents were lit, revealing a length of the hallway to a bend up ahead. Tunnels two and three both branched to the left at ten and eleven o'clock. "Take eleven o'clock. I'll sweep noon," Jagger said.

Eleven o'clock would be aiming for the Dunlop Mausoleum. I stayed close to the wall, heard nothing and started to jog. The tunnel was lined with concrete, but it didn't look complete. Water was running between seams and it smelled dank. There was a slight bend ahead and I could see a shadow quiver on the floor. I shouldered my MP5, drew my pistol, fired toward the bend's concave wall. A soldier stepped into view, sprayed bullets in my direction. I caught one on the bone on top of my shoulder. I fired into his shin, watched the bone explode. The soldier fell to the ground. I drew the tranquilizer gun, aimed and shot him in the stomach. I listened for boots, heard nothing, pushed forward. At the end of the tunnel was a steel door identical to the door in Gould's Mausoleum. This one had a crank with a loop for a heavy-duty padlock, but no padlock. I put my ear to the door, listened. Not a creature was stirring. *Not even a mouse*, I thought to myself. I started the crank and the door swung toward me at a painfully slow rate, scraping on a guide-path on the floor. A shaft of light poured into the mausoleum's central cavity exposing a scene worthy of Dionysus. Along the exterior walls were tarp-covered pallets and the pallets ringed a central altar littered with no less than one hundred wine bottles, some broken, some half-full. On the far side of the mausoleum, stacked on a sarcophagus, was a tall pile of pizza boxes. I approached one of the pallets, pulled back the tarp.



I met Jagger at the end of the tunnel. He had a grin on his face. “Clear?” he asked.

“Now it is. Did you strike gold?”

He laughed, pulled a radio from his waistband and keyed it. “Carrington—roll!” We could hear the forklifts approach and then see them rumble down the ramp. Carrington wasn’t far behind.

“Jesus,” she said, reaching for my shoulder.

“It’s fine. I’m going to sweep the Goelet Tunnel.”

“No, let me do it. Take the SASS guy to the gold,” she said. “I’m a big girl.” She threw an empty magazine on the ground, slapped in a new one, smiled, and then the light went out of her eyes. I watched her collapse to her knees. She let go of the gun and it clattered to the ground. I reached for her chin—I wanted her to look up at me. Jagger dove into my back. The SASS officer jumped from the forklift, started firing down the Goelet passage. My cheek was pressed to the floor. I watched Carrington’s body crumple, her face landing inches from my own.

“It sucks when there are three cigarettes in the ashtray,” I remembered her saying. I reached out, closed her eyes. Bullets were sparking off the floor and walls. I don’t know how much time passed, but I was back on my feet, charging down the tunnel, zigzagging, rounds whizzing past my head, one nicking the top of my ear. I slid across the concrete floor, imagined hearing an ump yell *‘SAFE!’* I pulled the pin of a concussion grenade, threw it. Grabbed another, pulled the pin, and threw it. I could see the air superheating from the gunfire and rage, then the shockwaves from the grenades rippled through the walls. I watched smoke arrange into standing waves, break apart. I didn’t pause. I drew my MP5, fired through the smoke, sprayed back and forth, back and forth, up and down until the magazine was empty. When the last shell-casing hit the concrete floor and rolled to a stop, I knew the tombs were ours, every last one.



NOVEMBER 1st 2001, 5:30 ^{AM}, SPARROW’S POINT: Jagger and I stood on the dock, watched the last container float over the Mamlambo, then come to rest in its lashing frame. The air was heavy with sorrow. I could hear the small cargo ship groan against

its moorings and it felt like something similar was happening in our hearts.

“Devon was like a daughter to me and I’ll do right by her.” Jagger said. Two SASS officers carried a wooden box up a gangway and onto the ship. “McShain, Major Carrington and I, well—we had plans. But there were too few of us to stem the tide. Carrington’s dad tried to warn the Joint Chiefs about the satyrs in their midst. He ended up in the bottom of San Francisco Bay. He was a teetotaler, Val, but it was ruled driving while intoxicated. And to add insult to injury, gross negligence—*after the fact*. Devon’s mother died soon after. And McShain—he’s being fed through a tube in a nursing home in Tampa. The last of our little fifth column was the spitfire you called Dancer. We did our best, but we were so few. I’m doing what I can to push the dagger in where it hurts most—*their wallets*. But someone needs to take a risk and tell it how it is. And right now, I can only think of one person worthy of the task—right, Ushomi?”

“And what happens to all this?” I asked.

Jagger ran his hand across the top of his head, felt the bristles on his chin. “During the Anglo-Zulu War, there was a vast network of caves in the Hlobane Mountains in which the Zulu’s had placed snipers. Above the caves rose succeeding plateaus. The English were baited, drawn atop the plateaus, surrounded. They soon discovered their predicament, were forced into the surrounding passes where they were fired upon by the Zulu armies. It was one of the few resounding successes that the Zulus were to enjoy. But the caves gave me an idea. The gold is going back to Zululand, the part of the world from which nine tenths of it was torn. I will never say aloud to where it all goes but I will say most will go right back in the holes from which it was dug. I think it’s the least the great, great grandson of Shaka Zulu can do for his people, no? But more importantly, I’m avenging my father—he died a senseless death at the hands of a petty cartel. And when you see the price of gold rise, it won’t be because little Nicky Sternheimer is hoarding it, but because 1.5 billion worth went missing. Can you weigh the lives of the Zulus in troy ounces? Little Nicky is about to learn that you can’t.”

On the bow of the ship, barely visible in the pale light abstracting his outline from the murk stood Bheka Kaleni. Jagger saluted him and Kaleni saluted back. Jagger looked east and I could see the Sun

rise in his sunglasses. He took them off, threw them into the water. “I won’t need them anymore. It was the harsh light of hypocrisy that I couldn’t stand.” Jagger approached me, held my good shoulder with his left hand, and looked me in the eye. “One more thing, Val: *go to her*. She needs you.”

As the ship pulled away from Hathaway Island, creasing the ocean with its bow, I pulled an envelope out of my shirt pocket. I had carried it with me, unopened, since Andelko’s performance of Gluck at the Crescent Theatre. I waited until the Mamlambo was swallowed by the horizon, opened it. Inside was a picture of a young man of thirty-three and a young woman of thirty-five. The woman had her arms wrapped around the man’s neck, her lips pressed to his cheek—a cheek swollen by a smile that was its own revelation: *he was in love*.

× **100102-101202MD**

*“In a mutable era during which memetic engineers transmute historical fiction into fact, it is the plight of the individual to assume more and know less.
Much less.”*

—George Irwin

AJITA, A NOVELLA

JULY 5th 2010-JULY 7th 1946

MONDAY, 11:11 ^{AM} (LST)⁴¹: “Take your god damn hands off me!”

“Stop struggling! Just stop moving!” Strand forced his knee between the woman’s legs, dug his fingers into her throat. Her mouth was forming words but there was no longer sound. He watched her lips turn blue, her eyes widen. An alarm sounded. Someone was at the door. He released the woman. She gasped for breath, clawed the air, flailed on the bed like a fish out of water. “You’ll be fine,” Strand said, getting up, crossing the room to the intercom. “Who is it?” he asked, depressing a red button.

“Le Croix,” a gravelly voice said. “We’re late.”

“I’m in the middle...” Strand wiped beads of sweat from his forehead, looked back over his shoulder at the woman on the bed curled into a fetal position, her face buried in her hands. “I’ll be down in ten minutes.”

“Five,” the voice crackled from the intercom. “You’ll be down in five.”

Strand tucked in the tails of his shirt, cinched his belt, and strode over to the chair over the back of which hung his snakeskin jacket. He put it on and felt the pockets for his gun. On the wall outside the bathroom was a rectangular console. He leaned toward it, whispered something unintelligible and the hologram of the woman on the bed disappeared. Strand punched the wall, hard enough to split the sheath of skin over a knuckle of his right hand. Blood

⁴¹ LUNAR STANDARD TIME

sprayed in a spider web pattern on the wall. He cursed, left the apartment.

Le Croix was in the lobby of Wiltshire Dome's Regency Hotel, talking to a bellhop, a woman with a maroon cap, large eyes, a wispy face, luscious lips. Strand approached them and she smiled, revealing a head filled with unnaturally white teeth. "She's going to party with us later," Le Croix said, slapping her on the bottom. It was almost imperceptible, but Strand could see her flinch—it was like an instantaneous surface-layer ripple across her features. It made his heart race and he didn't know why. "Watch this," Le Croix said, removing his gun from his shoulder holster. He put it under the bellhop's chin, pushed until she was staring up at the ceiling. "See, I told you. She's definitely going to party with us. Spirited, right?" I watched the bellhop's breast rise and fall, her breath quickening. Her right fist clenched, unclenched. There were rings on three fingers, one with the hotel seal—the outline of an owl with ovular eyes. Strand grabbed Le Croix's arm, jerked him away from the bellhop, and twisted his arm behind his back.

"You scum," Strand said, driving his knee into the back of Le Croix's leg. Le Croix sank to the floor, dropping his gun. "Pick it up," Strand said to the bellhop. She bent over, picked it up. "Hit him over the head with it. Really crack him." Le Croix struggled, but Strand started to twist his wrist, digging his fingernails into the flesh. "Go ahead!"

The bellhop swung her arm and the handle of the gun connected with the bone above Le Croix's temple. Blood started to drip on the floor. Strand let go of Le Croix. He dropped to his knees, felt his head and looked at the blood on his hand. He took a handkerchief from his pocket, dabbed at the wound. Strand helped him to his feet, held out his hand for the gun. The bellhop placed it in his hand, backed up until she was flush against a pillar. "I am awake. I am alive," Le Croix hissed. He threw the bloodied handkerchief at the bellhop's feet, started for the tunnel to headquarters. Strand followed.

"There was a time, Strand. There was a time." They were walking through an empty tunnel, the roof of which was a dirty, reinforced matrix of silica and titanium webbing. "I'm so fucking tired of this crap, Roy." Le Croix was the only one that called Strand by his first name. "I'm not doing any of the talking this time. It's all you. For

once, I'm just along for the ride." Strand poked Le Croix with the muzzle of the gun. Le Croix took it, put it in the holster.

"You used to like this job," Strand said. "I remember you used to pee yourself when we got an assignment. You're a monster now—a bearded monster."

Le Croix reached for his face, ran his fingers through his beard. Blood was caking on his forehead. "We're about to see the Bureau Chief, Roy. He's going to tell us that someone flipped out, made for the airlocks and maybe did a swan-dive from the gables"

"Who's left?" Strand interjected.

Le Croix ignored him: "He'll say something like, *'We need you boys to find him. Seems he slipped through the cracks—can't have a loose cannon running about.'* But who gives a shit, Roy. Know how many have slipped through the cracks, gotten out, died trying? A lot, my friend. Dozens. I've seen them dive through airlocks, run naked into the lunar night, turn into bloody ice-sculptures—on our watch, too. Not that anyone cares. Not so long as we kill one or two every now and again."

"Relax, Frank." Strand sped up, started to walk a few paces ahead of Le Croix. The tunnel began to taper into a glass-domed atrium with a central flight of stairs leading down into a cavernous office space. It was empty: desks, chairs, conference rooms—no people. At the far end of the office space a door stood open. A thin man with a hunchback paced back and forth, talking aloud, waving his arms. His voice rose as we approached. "You're finished, Balls! Done! You had a lot going for you once upon a time." Strand and Le Croix watched Craig Balls walk into view, lean into the thin man's face, see him sneer, his lips curling away from his teeth.

"I'm taking him," Le Croix said, drawing his gun, taking a knee, aiming toward Balls and the thin man.

Balls peered into the office space which was largely encased in shadows. All but a handful of hydrogen tubes in the ceiling were dead, while the remaining tubes offered a pale, sickly green glow. Balls grimaced, shouted, "You, scum! I see you dirty cocksuckers. What are you going to do, Le Croix? Shoot me?"

"That's the second time I've been called scum in less than ten minutes, Roy. I'm beginning to get a complex."

Balls backed away from the thin man, walked into the office space. He put his right hand in his pocket, rocked back on his heels. With his left hand he pulled away his jacket, lifted his t-shirt, and

exposed his hairy belly. He patted it, shouted to Le Croix: "Right here, asshole." He pointed to his bellybutton, "Bull's eye! You ever actually see a bull, Le Croix?"

Le Croix fired and Balls flew backward through the air, collided with a plate-glass window, flopped onto the floor. The thin man came out of the office, stepped over Balls. The green light shed from the hydrogen lamps revealed a deeply pitted face and an ugly scar running laterally across the man's cheeks. His nose was badly disfigured, twisting in the middle as though on a hinge, the beak pointing at an exaggerated angle to the right. Another ragged scar gave his philtrum a zipper appearance.

"Still a good shot, Le Croix," Baxter said, kicking the body at his feet, "Didn't have to shoot him, though. It was just a pay grievance, but one less mouth to feed, I suppose." Royal Baxter was the Bureau Chief of Spartan Arms, Ajita's now three-man-strong security division. He had been born and raised in Wiltshire Dome, knew nothing else and didn't care to. His father was the second Bureau Chief and there had been no question but that he'd follow in his father's footsteps.

Baxter lurched on long legs across the office, stopped in front of a translucent wall. He put his ear to it, seemed to be listening for something. "I can hear it crackle in there. I know there's juice." He wrestled a nearby chair off its track, picked it up above his head and rammed it into the wall, which responded instantly, as if alive. Light exploded across its length, died, came back to life, died. Then the wall glowed a soft red, then orange, then yellow, pulsed softly. The chair was now lying at his feet. Baxter kicked it, sending it toppling end over end toward us. "Come here!" he shouted. We walked to his side. "Squint. You can see the old pictures resolve every once in awhile." Once upon a time the wall was filled with images—a timeline illustrating the history of Wiltshire Dome. "Right here," Baxter said, tapping the smooth surface with a long, ragged fingernail. "Right there was a picture of Lord Palmer. You could see him grin through his tinted visor as he laid the proverbial cornerstone. Cornerstone! Yeah, right, like we lay God damn cornerstones!" Baxter rushed Le Croix, grabbed him by his lapels and screamed. There was spittle on his lips and droplets of saliva landed on Le Croix's face. "I'm getting out of here...out of this...*this tomb!* Look around!" He pushed Le Croix into Strand, shook his fists in the air. "Look at this god forsaken hole! There

was a woman, right here!” Baxter patted the desk next to which he stood—patted it in an almost affectionate way. “She sat here, took calls. I used to listen to her talk from my office. She had a warm voice. She was thin, wasn’t well, never recovered from that one bug. But she was still beautiful, frail, and delicate. How many ways do I have to describe it!?” He pushed past us, picked up the overturned chair, sat heavily. “I had a face then, too—a good face. That woman! This whole room was filled with women back then. But that one, that’s the one I wanted.” Baxter picked up a mug that lay at his feet, hurled it at the desk. “Her name was Elizaveta. Eliza.”

On the desk stood overturned picture frames. Strand picked one up, rubbed a layer of dust from the glass. It was a picture of Eliza and Baxter. On Baxter’s knee sat a little boy with golden hair and a toothy smile. The photo was taken in the dome near Racket Hill. The ridge was in silhouette, broken only by a row of antennas.

“I’m getting out of this fucking hole!” Baxter cursed. “But first, you scumbags are going to do something for me. We’ve got another saboteur. He came on the Dundee Transport. He was trouble in the colonies, but had contacts, friends—rich friends. Nobody wanted him. So he came here, didn’t work, sat in that hotel bar, drank.” Strand knew the guy, had seen him at the bar often, even drank with him. They’d take turns leaping over the counter, plundering bottles.

“I knew him,” Strand said, carefully setting down the picture.

“Figures,” Le Croix responded.

“What the fuck difference does it make, Frank? At least he had something to run from.”

“I don’t know what *that’s* supposed to mean you stupid prick.” The soft glow in the wall died, forcing the room into thicker shadows. Baxter was leaning back in the chair, his legs stretched out, arms crossed over his eyes.

“Your job, *gen-tle-man*,” Baxter started, sounding out every syllable, “Is to dig up this degenerate. Ends up someone in the colonies wants him—say he made off with information. Remember that, kids: Information, text? *She* knew text!” Baxter sat up, stared at the darkened wall. “Toss me your gun.” Le Croix un-holstered his gun, walked it over to Baxter. Baxter took it, held it in the palm of his hand as if weighing it. “There’s a file on my desk. You’re authorized—use your thumbprint. It’s under ‘S’ for Stack. And I think that’ll do it. You’re both about as sick of this accursed place

as I am. Get Stack on a shuttle to Boylston Traps.” Interestingly, there were no more shuttles to Boylston Traps, but Le Croix decided against mentioning it. “Go with him if you want—see the Universe. Hand me that.” Baxter motioned for the framed photograph. Strand picked it up, handed it to him. Baxter clutched it to his chest, put the muzzle of the gun in his mouth, and fired. The bullet exited the top of his skull, ricocheted off the ceiling.

“Damn,” Le Croix said. “He’s not going to party with us tonight.”



2:15 PM (LST): “What do you remember about being a kid, Roy?” Le Croix was running his thumb over the fingerprint reader embedded in Baxter’s monitor. “Shit, am I dirty or something?”

“Let me,” Strand said, squeezing past Le Croix, sitting in Baxter’s seat. He passed his thumb over the reader and the monitor came to life, revealing a touch-screen keypad of numbers and letters. He tapped the letter ‘S,’ scrolled down a list of names: Sausalito, Sands, Siegfried, *Stack*— Strand tapped the entry for Stack. “Not many ‘Ss,’” Strand commented.

“Not many of anything, smart-ass. What’s it say?” Le Croix leaned close, the wiry bristles of his beard obstructing the monitor. “Blah, blah, blah, Ares Mines, Dunkirk, Whitesboro, Tanaka & Associates, Drake Downs, blah, blah, nothing, sport. Oh, wait! Fassbinder & Co., Agent. Must be it, right—a courier, smuggler?” Strand was rummaging around in Baxter’s desk, looking for a pen. “Maybe it doesn’t matter. Hey, hand me those!” Strand handed him a bottle of painkillers that was sitting in the bottom of a desk drawer. He popped the lid, shoveled several tabs onto his tongue and looked around for something to wash them down. A half drunk cup of coffee sat on the edge of the desk. Le Croix picked it up, took a swallow and swished it around inside of his mouth. “Tastes old,” he remarked.

“You want to know what I remember?” asked Strand.

“About what?” Le Croix asked.

“About my childhood, you dimwit,” Strand shouted.

“Right, what do you remember?” Le Croix tapped the screen. It turned black. He pushed himself away from the desk, the chair gliding smoothly across the floor on rollers.

“My father was in charge of the gunnery range at Dunstan Fields. I was six when he died. We were—my sister, my little brother, and

mother—on the tube to Vale Sol. We were going to pick up my father at Dunstan, have lunch, and make a day of it. This is about the time the skirmishes with the miners were starting. We got to Dunstan, were about to get off when a wall of fire poured over the ridge. I remember it as a wall of fire—it was really a plasma flare from the Nagreb Reactor. I watched it spread out over the gunnery range in the valley. I could see from the car windows little black dots running back and forth and this hood of fire, like a blazing tidal wave arc over their heads, ready to swallow them—the little black dots. I remember lurching forward in my seat, my sister falling to her knees, the train surging forward, accelerating...”

“Sounds like a good show,” Le Croix said, heading out the door into the office space. Strand shook his head, rubbed his eyes, and followed Le Croix.

“Are we leaving him like this?” Strand stood in front of Baxter whose head was resting on his chest.

“Good a place as any.” Le Croix replied.



2:45 ^{PM} (LST): In the tunnel from headquarters, Strand and Le Croix met Koga, Wiltshire Dome’s executive engineer. He was drunk, weaving back and forth. “Sirs!” he slurred, saluting Strand and Le Croix.

“Koga,” they replied.

“Let me show you something,” he said. “It’s a test of faith. Also a demonstration. I want to show you the merits of over-engineering. He pulled a small caliber pistol from his waist, pointed at the transparent ceiling. “You see that star?” Strand squinted, tried to follow the old man’s gaze.

“Which one?” Le Croix asked, focusing on the gun, prepared to subdue Koga. But a second later Koga was firing at the glass. A crack began to form, spread across the window. Le Croix tackled Koga, wrested the gun from his grip and punched him in the jaw; punched him again. The old man was tossing on the ground, weak, head lolling side to side, “Stupid old man.” Le Croix looked up at the glass ceiling, saw the crack. “Spreading?” he asked.

“No. I guess that’s what he meant by over-engineering.”

“Just the same, I’d rather not be here when it blows.”

They left Koga lying in a stupor, staring at the stars. From the tunnel they emerged into the lobby of the Regency, an empty hotel,

save for the sole remaining member of the staff. The bellhop was still standing by the pillar at which Strand and Le Croix had left her. In her hand was the bloody handkerchief. She seemed to come to life when she saw Le Croix—her eyes widened and her body stiffened. “Dear God,” he said, shaking his head. “It’s like a dog.” The bellhop jogged over, handed Le Croix the handkerchief. He took it.

“Hi, Frank,” she said.

“How long have you been here?” Le Croix asked, “At the hotel?”

“I’m not sure,” the bellhop said, the tassel on her little cap bobbing back and forth.

“It’s kind of cruel in a way, Roy. They could have repurposed her instead of just leaving her. They leave anything else? They took the cash registers, the paintings, the lighting fixtures, mirrors, even plants. But they leave a droid.” He put his arm around her waist, pulled her across the floor, her loafers sliding on the dusty tile. “Let’s dance, sweetheart.” She rested her head on his shoulder.

“I’m so tired,” the droid said.

Le Croix took the droid’s arms, put them around his neck. “Like this, see?” he said. He rocked back and forth on his feet, hummed. “See, this is dancing. What’s your name?”

“Laura,” she said. “I’m so tired.”

“Well, listen, Laura. I’m not sure if you noticed, but the Regency is closed for the season.” Le Croix stepped away from the droid, but held her hands. He rotated the owl ring from her finger, palmed it, and got down on one knee. “The Regency is defunct, Laura.” Le Croix swept his hand holding the ring around the lobby. It was monstrous, with polished rock columns, a lattice dome, walls with intricate carvings, large pots filled with dead palm trees. “We are your only customers.”

“It *is* awfully quiet,” Laura said, as though noticing for the first time.

“Laura, look at me.” Laura looked down at Le Croix, her unnaturally white teeth gleaming, eyes ablaze with whatever strange power burned behind them. “Will you marry me?”

Strand broke out into laughter, stomped his foot on the ground. But the spell wasn’t broken. Le Croix gripped Laura’s hands and she sunk to her own knees. “Will you, Laura?” Le Croix put the ring with the owl on Laura’s ring finger. The droid’s lips parted slightly and actual tears began to flow from her eyes. Le Croix didn’t seem

surprised, but Strand found it unsettling that a droid that was relatively unperturbed about being left behind in a rotting hotel could also exhibit what appeared to be a genuine response to a proposal.

“You’ve just gotten engaged to a droid, Le Croix. I know you’ll be happy together.”

Le Croix stood, helped Laura up, kissed her tenderly on the lips and brushed the droid’s hair out of her glowing eyes.

“In less than an hour, Le Croix,” Strand said, “I’ve seen you terrorize this droid, kill a man, see another man suicide himself and now this! It’s almost over for us, isn’t it?”

“It is, Roy. But we’re not going down without a fight—Laura, either. By the way, Laura, this is Roy but everyone calls him Strand.” She offered Strand her hand. He shook it. It was cold.



TUESDAY, 3:33 ^{AM} (LST): Strand woke in ink black and stared through a thick round window into the lunar night. Behind him the love program squirmed in bed, moaned in her electric sleep. He wondered if Koga still lay in a drunken lump in the tunnels, dreaming about architectonics. Koga was the oldest ghost in Wiltshire Dome and as soon as Strand, Le Croix and the bellhop lit out for parts unknown, he’d be not only the oldest ghost but the last. They might better take him. He had a gun and wasn’t afraid to pull the trigger: a drunk, gun-toting old ghost.

Strand crawled back into bed, lifted the sheets and looked at the love program’s glowing body. He touched her thigh, felt a thin layer of static crackle under his palm; felt the contours of her back. She opened her eyes, batted her optical filament eyelashes. Her lips glistened, parted. He kissed them.



7:00 ^{AM} (LST): As he dressed, Laura sat in bed, braiding her hair. Her eyes were closed and she was humming.

“I don’t know that tune, darling,” Le Croix called from the bathroom.

“It’s something I heard in the lobby.”

“When?” Le Croix asked, poking his head out of the bathroom, toothbrush dangling from his mouth. He disappeared. Laura could hear him spit into the sink, flush the toilet. He came back, hopping,

forcing his foot into a boot. He sat heavily next to her. He knew the question was meaningless to her. “Were you lonely—in the lobby?”

“Lonely?” She finished her braids, got up, and sat in Le Croix’s lap.

“No, deathly bored.”

“Bored?” Le Croix started.

She traced the ridge of his nose with her pointer finger, kissed his bristled chin. “I knew you wouldn’t shoot me. Come here.” She took his right hand, put it on her chest. “Feel anything?” He could feel her chest rise and fall, her heart beat. She put her lips to his ear. “It’s a heart, Le Croix. You have so little time, so you live in terror of it. I can wait forever, but it doesn’t mean I want to.” She brushed her nose against his cheek.



8:08 ^{AM} (LST): They met in the lobby. The sound of a piano was echoing around the carved rock walls. It was coming from the bar. Strand led Le Croix and Laura into the lounge. Tables were overturned and trash was heaped in the corners. One un-hooded hydrogen bulb floated over the bar. Empty glasses were strewn on the counter and dozens of half-empty bottles were tipped on their sides. In the far corner sat Koga at a grand piano, its top up. As he played he sang along to the tune:

*I'm standing on the edge of time
I walked away when love was mine
Caught up in a world of uphill climbing
The tears are in my mind
And nothing is rhyming, oh, Mandy...*

Le Croix coughed. The playing stopped. Koga looked up, his eyelids droopy with drink. “You!” Koga shouted. He stood and fell backwards over the piano stool. Laura ran to Koga, knelt beside him. Strand and Le Croix waited.

Laura helped him to his feet, brought him over by his arm. “Koga,” Le Croix started. “We have a proposition for you.”

“Not interested,” Koga replied. He seemed suddenly aware that he was in the company of a woman and that the woman had him by his arm. “You have no scent, young lady,” he said, burrowing his nose into her neck, sniffing.

“It’s like this, Koga,” Strand called from the bar. He was pouring himself a glassful of Czar-brand Vodka. “We’re lighting out. We killed Balls and Baxter killed himself. There’s no one else. This is our last hurrah, old chap—one last bounty and we need one more warm body to round out the hunting party.” Strand hoisted himself onto the bar, sat, swallowed the glassful of vodka, and poured another.

“I remember when the Regency was a respectable place,” Koga complained, clearly struggling to form words without slurring. “I designed that dome, the support structures, everything, right down to the vacuum seals. I over-engineered everything!”

Le Croix shot Strand a glance and they both burst out into uncontrollable laughter. “You fucking cowboys,” Koga shouted, reaching into his waistband, “Where’s my gun?”

“This one?” Le Croix asked, holding Koga’s handgun over his head. He tossed it to Koga who promptly dropped it.

“Bastard,” he murmured. He bent over, picked up the gun, held it to his face, closed one eye and peered down the barrel. He pulled the trigger, but there was no sound. Koga fell over anyway, dead drunk.

“We’ll take him with us,” Le Croix said. “We could use the entertainment.”



3:33 ^{PM} (LST): “When was the last time you schmoes left Regency at Wiltshire?” Koga asked. Strand and Le Croix didn’t reply. The answer would be embarrassing.

Buttoning up a heavy overcoat, wrapping a thick scarf around his neck, Koga shuffled over to Laura on wooden legs, held her face in his oversized hand, said, “I know how long *you’ve* been here.” Laura wiggled free, ran to Le Croix’s side.

“So once more, old-timer, why the underground?” Le Croix asked.

Koga ushered them over to an oblong window with polarized glass, pointed to the ribbing of Wiltshire Dome’s exoskeleton. “You’ve watched it all fall down around you and you haven’t noticed.”

“I wouldn’t say we haven’t noticed,” Strand said. “Ignored, more like.” He removed a handful of black, sticky thiopental sticks from his pocket, put one in his mouth and lit it. “Ignored, right Le Croix?”

“Give me one of those,” Le Croix said.

“I’ll do you one better.” Strand removed the lit stick from his mouth, handed it to Le Croix. “No charge.”

Koga pointed to the alloy ribbing near the peak of Wiltshire Dome, traced the length of a rib with his long fingernail to the ground where it disappeared under the superstructure. The Regency was a supposedly hermetically sealed facility within a hermetically sealed superdome. “The seals have dried, failed. Solar radiation has done its job. Most of those hexagonal panes are sliding around in their frames like lenses in a broken pair of glasses. Can’t go out there. It’s suicide.”

“Then I think we should seriously consider it,” Le Croix said, his head wreathed in smoke.

“We’ll take the Dunstan Tubes through Vale Sol. It’s the only way out of here.”

“I’m not taking the tubes, old man,” Le Croix said. “I know what’s happened down there! The air’s green! I don’t care enough about Stack or Boylston Traps to become some tube-itinerant.”

“It is ionized air, you twit. Completely harmless. Most of the seals on the trans-lunar tubes have been damaged, so they’ve turned into monstrous cathodes, but they still work. We need supplies!” Koga asserted. He turned and stalked toward the bar. Laura followed him.

“I have plans, Le Croix. I’m taking the tubes. You and Talky Tina can stay right here and rot for all I care. The old man and I are going on holiday,” Strand said, defiant.

“Just you and the old man, huh?” Le Croix patted a bulge in Strand’s snakeskin jacket. “You mean you, the old man and your precious hologram.” Le Croix winked, licked his lips, gave Strand the thumbs-up.

“I would say that makes us even—you’ve got your thing and I’ve got mine. That just leaves the old man stag.”

“He’s got his vacuum seals and superstructures...”

A voice boomed from the far side of the lobby: “Gen-tle-man!”

“Christ!” Le Croix said, drawing his gun, pointing through the dead palms. “See anything?” He threw his thiopental stick on the ground where it lay smoldering. Strand dropped to his knees, belly-laughing, tears streaming from his bloodshot eyes. “Why are you laughing?” Le Croix demanded. He fired through the brown palm fronds clumped in the middle of the Regency’s atrium. He grabbed

Strand by his t-shirt, “You prick! You better tell me why you’re laughing.”

Strand stopped laughing, caught his breath and pushed the muzzle of Le Croix’s gun away from his nose. “It’s nothing, man. There’s nothing there. You’re just hearing things.”

“Speaking of hearing things...” It was Koga. He and Laura had loaded a baggage cart with liquor bottles. Le Croix got up, went to Laura, unbuttoned three of the buttons of her uniform.

“You’re not working anymore,” he said. “You can let your hair down.” She smiled her blinding droid smile and Le Croix stroked her auburn hair.

Koga continued: “I was saying, things are different in the underground: *broken*. There are optical anomalies you’ve got to be prepared for. It’s not real. It’s just living history, in a sense. You’re going to see a lot of people down in those tubes. Not real people, but a kind of static resonance that generates the appearance of people. Usually these phenomena live beyond the visible spectrum. But once we get in those tubes, the faster we move, the more realistic that resonance will become. No one took the time to explain it. My recommendation: once you get on a train, and once they start appearing, just sit on one, close your eyes. It really is the damndest thing, though.”

“So you’re saying it’s safe,” Strand said.

“I said no such thing. Know what they told me when I first started engineering for Regency Hotels and Inntergalactic before that? They said, ‘*You aren’t Earthside anymore. ‘Safety’s’ a relative term.*’ I guess what I’m saying is, you’ll be relatively safe down there.”

“Good enough for me,” Strand said, grabbing the old man, pulling him toward a bank of elevators. Le Croix and Laura followed, pushing the baggage cart. A bottle of vodka rolled off, broke, spilled across the polished floor.



4:00 ^{PM} (LST): NARRATOR: *Beneath the bluster, the braggadocio, the drug use, the violence, redeeming qualities could be uncovered in the persons Strand and Le Croix; that is, if someone had the improbable capacity, time, patience and misguided desire to unearth said qualities. They were complex men. Both had grown up in the superdome complex known as Ajita, sons of stalwart servicemen—servicemen born to Ajita; to women that were aboard the first ships. All children born to these women, the first of a kind, were called Sons*

and Daughters of Ajita. And to the degree that one could be considered such on the moon, this first generation were nobles, if not noble in a plenary sense. And the children of the nobles of whom Strand and Le Croix were two, inherited a mantle that was by and large nepotic. Unlike their fathers and grandfathers, they were completely without skills, or history and it is this absence of history, of context, that hastened the collapse of Ajita. But it could be argued that they were blameless—Strand, Le Croix and their cohort. They grew up in a world that was already in an advanced state of decay, from much of which they were shielded, being the sons of what was considered a privileged class: administrators, servicemen, engineers, while the lunar majority consisted of miners and drill corps., all of whom lived in crude encampments carved out of the crater walls north of Ajita.

The silica mines were a lesson in gross incompetence, built quickly and haphazardly. Collapses were frequent and the loss of life was staggering. What is worse, the labor was conscripted from Earth. The miners were rugged, angry and completely without the tools required in order to effect a successful people's uprising. Consequently, they had little enthusiasm. They did not maintain their equipment (nor knew how) and sabotage became a hobby. What is more, there were no rigorous quotas against which they could measure their progress, no standards of measure; their objectives were a mystery: 'Drill! Drill deeper?' And so they did, and many became permanently entombed, forgotten, uncounted, written off the books, lodged in cold, airless holes with broken drill bits.

The life of the miners was something about which the sons of the nobles were fascinated. Strand and Le Croix, as boys, would listen attentively to the tales their fathers told, hear the exhaustion in their voices, the gravel in their larynxes, as they described the horror that was the mine. And their fathers seemed only to find relief in perversion, in the description of the torture that they wrought; of the anguish that it was their job to deliver. It was the Sons of Ajita that were charged with the ghastly job of disposing of those that were completely inept or dysfunctional, or had morale problems. And it was poor morale that was punished most severely, but not swiftly. A gift of swift punishment was made to only the inept. But like the miners, they were lost men, without objectives, without structure and worse still, like Strand and Le Croix, without history. Ajita was all they knew...

“For the love of Maitreya, SHUT UP,” Le Croix shouted, banging on an unlit console mounted on the wall, desperately trying to summon the elevator. “Why can’t he keep his mouth shut!?”

“Who?” asked Koga. He placed himself between Le Croix and the wall.

“The narrator, old man. Don’t tell me you can’t hear him!” Strand shrieked, squeezing himself between Le Croix and Koga, grabbing Koga’s thick lapels, shoving him against the wall, snarling.

“I can’t hear him. I don’t hear anything, Roy. Maybe it’s my old ears. Maybe it’s the vodka. I don’t hear it. What’s it saying?” Koga patted Strand’s chest. “Back away, would you?”

“He’s there,” Le Croix said, stalking toward Laura, his hands beckoning. “I can hear him breathing, at night, right now, can feel his breath on my neck and I swear, by God, one day I’ll kill him.” He put his hands around Laura’s neck, pretended to strangle her. “I’ll sneak up on him like this, but from behind, see? And I’ll squeeze the life out of his meddling head. I’ll take his eyes as trophies, pickle them, carry them in a jar...”

Laura’s eyes were wide, the pupils dilated: “It’s coming,” she squeaked. “The elevator...”

Le Croix let go, took a knee and drew his gun. The entire lobby rumbled as the elevator approached. A brass bell sitting atop the Regency reception desk vibrated to the edge and fell, dinged one last time. “I’m in a foul mood. I’m shooting anything that moves—everything that moves. Stand back!”

The rumbling stopped. There was a rattling sound, as of heavy chains, and the elevator doors scraped open, revealing a flickering space filled with crates, tall stacks of dented luggage, piles of yellowing papers. “This stuff should go to Lost & Found.” Strand said, snickering. One of the stacks of luggage was swaying back and forth and Le Croix unloaded his gun, airing out suitcases, splintering crates, shredding papers, firing into the walls. His gun empty, Le Croix stood, stretched and yawned. The swaying tower of luggage collapsed to the floor and one of the suitcases popped open, spilling women’s lingerie onto the floor.

“Oh, boy,” Le Croix said, waving away the smoke that was flowing from the elevator’s entrance. He bent down, picked up a bra, held it out to Laura’s chest. “This is your lucky day!” he said, clearly satisfied with his newfound treasure. Laura blushed.

“It blushes!” Koga remarked, surprised.

Le Croix spun around, pointed the gun at Koga, and pulled the trigger. “If it were loaded, I’d still pull it, old man. You owe her an apology. But save it for later. It’ll give me something to look forward to.”



4:30 ^{PM} (LST): The tubes were a forlorn sight, stalactites hanging from the ceiling, several derelict, windowless cars hovering on sidings. Behind a glass panel sat a skeleton, its jaw hanging by one hinge.

“That your work, gentleman?” Koga asked.

“We’re not killers, you yellow bag of pus!” Strand shouted.

“I think it was,” Le Croix corrected him. “I think it was that night we got drunk with Baxter, the night the underground decompressed. I’m not saying we killed him, but it’s a distinct possibility we made sure he wasn’t alive.”

“I don’t remember that,” Strand said, fishing for a thiopental stick. He lit it, inhaled and picked some black specks from his lip. “No recollection.”

“That’s convenient,” Koga said.

Laura was wandering at the end of the station, barely visible in the cloudy air. “Frank!”

“She’s using your first name. I’m impressed. Must be love, huh?” Strand said.

“Yes, Roy,” Le Croix moved in the direction of Laura’s voice, glancing one last time at the skeleton in his plate-glass booth, “That was you, Strand. See the bullet holes—the chip in his collarbone? That’s a plain messy shot. Once in the collarbone and once in the jaw.” He walked away, shaking his head.

“It’s sodium gas, this haze,” Koga said, “Probably not very healthy. We need to find a working car, get into Vale Sol, at least Dunstan Fields, maybe even Dunstan Station. This man you’re after—Stack, right? You say he came in on a shuttle, a transport...”

“Transport,” Strand confirmed.

“Transport, yes. Had to be the Dundee—the automated transport from the Milford Orbiter. That was the last of them. Supposed to be empty. They were playing pool with the transports, aiming for Ajita, know that? Wiltshire was the target. It’s a game they play, the Admirals. Know how I know?” Strand was leaning against the skeleton’s booth, taking deep drags off the black stick. His eyes were red and running. “I’ll tell you how I know—”

“Doesn’t matter,” Strand said, blowing white rings into the air thick with yellow sodium gas. “Maybe I did kill him,” he offered, peering over his shoulder into black, cobwebbed eye-sockets.

“You don’t want to know who Stack is,” The old man said. “There’s a tower about a hundred meters from Wiltshire, on top of Spackle Point. It had a beacon once. You could watch it blink at night. Well, I took these old bones up there one afternoon last month. Suited up for the first time in I don’t know how long, went up to the tower. Was I lonely? Was I starved for companionship? Well that tower is like Babel, tweeting and singing, hissing and crackling; a regular symphony of interference: radio emissions from the Sun and the hum of background radiation from the plasma reactor in Nagreb; lots of noise—a miracle that anyone ever discerned anything intelligible out of that. I spent an afternoon up there, half in my suit, half out, sunglasses on, staring at the Sun...”

“You ever shut your mouth?”

Koga ignored him. “I began to hear voices and the tower began to rumble. The antenna was reorienting. Then clear as a bell, voices, dispatches, just like the old days.” Koga picked a bottle of vodka off the baggage cart, unscrewed the cap, and took a gulp. “Know what year it is, handsome?”

NARRATOR: Strand didn’t. And he didn’t care. He was thinking about the afternoon when the Nagreb Reactor melted down, killing his father, hundreds of other servicemen and their charges. As the Vale Sol tube lurched forward, he dove on top of his sister, but not in time to prevent her from staring into the light shed by the reactor. Strand watched her corneas spider-web with broken blood vessels, then they turned milky. He could still hear her scream...

“God damn it! If I wanted the world to know what I was thinking, I’d tell them. It’s my business, you bastard!”

“The narrator again, yes” Koga assumed, and took another swig of vodka.

Le Croix and Laura were running in their direction, waving their arms. “We found one,” they said in unison, out of breath, “An engineer’s car, just down the track, still sealed and working—probably.”

“If it’s lit up, it’s working,” Koga said, “Almost no moving parts.”



5:15 ^{PM} (LST): Together, the four of them hoisted the baggage cart carrying the liquor onto the car, pushing it to the far end, lashing it to a seat to keep it from rolling. Strand sat heavily, put his

feet up, let out a sigh. Koga fiddled with the control panel in the engineer's compartment. Every few minutes they could hear him swear, pound something.

"Hand us a bottle, will you?" Le Croix asked. Strand tossed them a bottle of Czar. Laura caught it, admired the label.

"Before it was the Regency, it was a Holiday Inntergalactic," Laura said. "Kemmons Wilson commissioned eleven red-series bellhops in 1962. I was one of them. He used to bring cases and cases of Czar Vodka, insisted that the bars were stocked with it." She brushed a thin layer of dust from the bottle, revealed the visage of Peter the Great. "Cases and cases, especially when Khrushchev was booked—"

"The Holiday Inntergalactic hosted the 22nd Congress of the Communist Party," Koga interjected from the entrance to the engineer's cab. "It was quite a to-do. Khrushchev was the only show in town back then, but you boys are probably too young to remember. You were still a couple of sniveling punks in short-pants, hanging on your mother's tits. But Electric Red remembers, don't you? And then it all went to hell. Can't put my finger on it, but something went awry on Earth. You know, I don't know. I came here with my parents when I was eleven, can barely remember it."

"He didn't come anymore after that," Laura said. "And you know how I knew things were changing? In the autumn of '63, they stopped watering the lobby plants. Everything died. The Inntergalactic became the Regency—"

"The mines closed," Koga continued. "The drilling stopped. The orientation of the antennas changed, were pointed at the Sun. This is around the time the reactor failed. What was left? Not much. A few ghosts, leftover engineers, a demoralized security force—Baxter's old man at the helm—stenographers and some mothers. Ajita became the back orifice for Earth's geosynchronous military satellites, chewing up, digesting, excreting and encrypting everything, for everyone. Ajita's where history was remade, where Earthside geopolitics was engineered. That's what your mothers did for Baxter's old man—all on orders from Moscow. Secretary Brezhnev was one of our last guests—he and Bob McNamara. He pinned medals on all of the crypto women. Then they burned us—washed their hands of Ajita."

"And Dean Rusk," Laura added.

“Right, Rusk. But that was an accident. He was in a capsule that crashed south of Boylston Traps. He was a mess: detached retina, broken femur, punctured lung...”

“I hate to be the fly in the ointment, but you think we can get this deathtrap moving sometime this year?” Le Croix asked. “I’ve got a hot date, don’t want to be late.”

“Apathy,” Koga shouted and Laura nodded in confirmation of his sentiment, “Once upon a time, Ajita was an important place—”

“You’re worse than the narrator, old man,” Strand said. “At least I can shut *him* up. You heard the man, he’s got a date and I’m supposed to chaperone, so let’s put on some speed!”

Koga huffed, “Tsk-tsk.” He went into the engineer’s cab, sat, and pressed several buttons. A monitor came to life, painted his face yellow. He pressed a big red button and the car filled with a pale violet light, began to strobe, while a low hum began to issue from the undercarriage.

“It’s moving!” Le Croix said. “And fast! I can’t even feel it!”

The hair on their heads stood on end and from every surface they received small shocks. Strand sat down, reached for the bottle of vodka that Laura was grasping to her chest. She handed it over and he took several swallows. The near-frictionless passage through the tube was disorienting. They passed no reference markers. They moved from blackness into blackness. The violet light inside the car began to darken, thicken, then brighten and the air grew dense. “You’re fine,” Koga called out. “There’s air, but there’s also a lot of leaks. The oxygen ratio is probably a little off and maybe on top of that we’re running into some fractionated lead. Not to worry. Keep breathing—deep breaths.”

Strand watched Le Croix clutch Laura, pulling her onto his lap, static electricity snapping and crackling on their clothing. They kissed and sparks travelled between their tongues. Beside them sat a young woman in a sarafan. She was staring out into the uninterrupted black of the tube. “Koga, it’s happening!” Laura and Le Croix saw the woman, jumped out of their seats. She didn’t seem to notice.

“It’s purely optical,” Koga called out, “There will be more in a minute. Why don’t you try and make a few friends, Strand. You have such a charming personality.”

Beside Strand appeared a little boy of seven or eight. He had a large tetrahedral block in his hand that he was turning end-over-

end, holding it in front of his face. He was smiling. “Hello?” Strand said.

The image of the boy began to grow deep purple, fill with what looked like wire filaments. They would glow and explode; reform and explode again. The boy threw the block in the air, caught it, turned to him, and cried, “Hey!” Strand jumped out of his seat.

“You said they weren’t real!”

The air sizzled and another apparition formed, took a seat next to the boy, put its arms around his shoulders. “Hello, love,” the apparition said. The boy smiled, handed the apparition his block.

“Hand me the bottle,” Le Croix said. Strand kept the bottle but handed Le Croix another bottle from the baggage cart. Together, the three of them backed into the engineer’s cab, watched the car fill with dozens of purple forms.

“We’re really moving now!” Koga said, squinting into the black void into which the car was hurtling. He looked over his shoulder, peered past the group crowded in the cab, beheld a car packed with ghostly passengers. “Oh! Oh, my... Grab me a bottle, Strand!”



6:15 PM (LST): “That’s starlight!” Laura said, pointing ahead of the car.

“Could be,” Koga answered, “Means we’re about to surface. When was the last time you kids were out this far?”

Strand and Le Croix looked at each other, shrugged. “Long time,” Le Croix said.

“Then this’ll be a treat. It’s probably not how you remember it. Last I knew, only a handful of domes were still standing east of Dunstan... *Wait!*” What was a small window of stars suddenly exploded into a huge field of blinking pinpoints of light and the car shot out of the underground and into a brilliant landscape that rolled away beneath them, “That was a surprise. Look, up and to the right, over the ridge. That’s Dunstan. You can see the skeleton of Babushkin Dome, the old smokestacks, the beacon. Damn! And there! See the red glow? Right over the ridge, back in ‘72, there was a little eruption—first volcanism observed in this region. It was going to be capped, used for geothermal power.” The control panel started to emit a loud crackling sound and a needle in a gauge started to dance wildly back and forth. “Just a few roentgens. You don’t want to live forever anyway, do you?”

“How do you know where this tube terminates?” asked Laura.

“I don’t. But the vacuum is pretty much intact so I’m guessing the terminus is in Dunstan, right there, look, *now!*” They were passing a parallel tube, a large section of which had detached. It was lying in the valley floor, shattered, as were several segments of a car. “That’s why Wiltshire doesn’t have visitors.”

“Who’d come?” Le Croix asked.

“Questions. Now you know why you needed to bring along this old drunk.” Koga rubbed his scruffy face, played with his wiry moustache. “Dunstan was settled by miners after Ajita was left for dead. Baxter was able to finagle an occasional resupply ship, usually Russian and very occasionally Japanese. Never American. That kept Wiltshire in beans and booze. Baxter was good that way. And someone Earthside must have been sentimental for Ajita, probably Brezhnev. We had food, but god knows what the miners ate. Maybe each other. They’re probably standing at the mouth of the tube with forks in their hands.”

The tube, which stood on pilings several meters above the lunar surface, began to descend until the car appeared to skim the ground. “Lord!” Le Croix gasped.

“Yeah, doesn’t look so good,” Koga confirmed. Ahead, about a thousand meters, the tube looked as though it was bent in an unnatural way. “Vacuum’s intact, but...”

The car filled with a thick green gas and the air grew viscous, difficult to breath. Their eyes began to dry out and itch and their skin grew scaly, “Alright, temps dropping fast,” Koga said, his lips cracking and bleeding, his fingertips turning the color of marble, “Hold onto each other. Must be a failure in the tube.” Koga tapped on a button that controlled the speed at which the car moved. He tapped and tapped and tapped and the car accelerated, the lunar surface turning into a grey blur. The air began to spark and static lightning began to arc between metallic objects and across the car’s control panel. A low howl turned into a groan, a phlegmatic death rattle and then rose in pitch into a scream. The walls began to buckle and blood began to run from their ears, nose and eyes, all but Laura, of course. The thick glass windshield began to warp, dimple and then the car dropped through a breach. Strand had time to look into the rear of the car. Through the noxious atmosphere, now turning brown, swirling with gas, he could still see the ghostly passengers, seemingly unperturbed. The little boy next to whom he

had sat was still tossing the block in the air, smiling. And then Strand was flying forward, into the console. He could feel blood running from his forehead, congealing quickly in the icy air. And then the scream stopped, the air cleared, the soft purple light returned. Le Croix picked him up off the console, was screaming something he couldn't hear. Strand put his hands to his ears, shook his head. Then he heard the sound of his heart beating in his skull, the sound of metal snapping back into shape.

"We made it!" Le Croix screamed. "It was a god damn gap! Vacuum my ass!"

Koga was lying in Laura's lap, murmuring something. "What's he saying?"

Le Croix put his ear to Koga's mouth. "Throttle he says! Turn her off!"

Strand leapt to the controls just as they descended into Dunstan Station. He smashed a red button with his fist and the car glided to a stop. They were alive and the apparitions were gone. "How many bottles broke?" Koga asked, spitting blood.



7:00 PM (LST): "What's it feel like—to be electric and red and for always?" Koga asked, reaching for Laura's face framed by red hair. "You carried Khrushchev's bags and Brezhnev's. Did they tip? I bet they were big tippers. I would tip a face like this—tip these lips..."

NARRATOR: *They sound like last words, don't they? They aren't. Koga is delirious but he's not going to die. Death, at this point, is for lesser men, like Baxter. Like Balls. No, Koga's life is only, say, eight-tenths complete. He has a lot of drinking to do. And there is the issue of one life to save. Yeah, Koga is hero material in exactly the way that Le Croix and Strand are not, which is not to say they are incapable of being heroic. They are just reluctant...*

"Relax and breathe. Just ignore him..."

...reluctant heroes. It can't be easy, being one of a handful of lives in such an unusual and sometimes uninviting world, but what a unique perspective! The things they've seen, but take for granted. And to live after such a lawless fashion, absent ethics, without morals, relying on raw sense...

“No! He’s in my head, making my teeth vibrate! It won’t do!” Strand protested. “I’ll help you, when you do it, when you strangle him. You can have his eyes, his liver, whatever, but I’m taking his heart. I’m going to eat it!”

“Get a grip, Roy. And give me a hand with this.” Strand and Le Croix carried the baggage cart laden with liquor bottles and Koga’s moaning body from the car to the Dunstan Station platform. Laura took off her scarf, wet it with Czar and dabbed at Koga’s forehead.

Koga reached for Strand. “I heard it! I heard the narrator, his voice. He was talking about me.”

“Save your energy, old man...” Le Croix said.

Unlike the Wiltshire Station, Dunstan was well-lit but no less macabre. In the corners were stacked still-dressed skeletons, one atop another, some still holding purses and teddy bears.

“You’d think they’d let go,” Laura observed.

“Even the dead have longings, sweetheart,” Koga croaked.

Le Croix had his hands in his pockets and was craning his neck, staring up at a long rectangular mural near the ceiling. “That’s not the Moon,” he remarked. “Would you look at *that*—I don’t even...”

“How could you,” responded Koga.

“How could I what?” asked Le Croix, still inspecting the mural, now on tiptoes, squinting his eyes.

“Describe what you’ve never seen. You’ve been to Dunstan, probably as a little boy and all these murals were right above your head. But you never noticed. Only your grandparents could have told you, described, given names to everything in the murals. They were there.” Koga sat up, patted Laura on the shoulder. “That’s Tokyo, Japan, or at least that’s how it looked in ‘54 or ‘55. If it were real, you’d be looking at Tokyo from Shibuya, standing in another train station 240,000 miles away: a short walk.”

“You know this *how*?” Le Croix asked.

“I was born there, in Asakusa. My parents and I left for Ajita just after the War. They were engineers, my parents and part of a team led by Valentin Glushko. Most of Ajita and all of Dunstan were built by the Japanese.”

Le Croix took off his wool overcoat, dropped it on the ground. “I’d like to see it,” he said. He reached up, touched the face of a young woman constructed with dozens of tiny, colored tiles.

“This is how it all falls apart,” Strand began, pointing a finger at Le Croix. “He gets ideas. Then the whole thing begins to unravel. I

see it clearly. And I'm helpless, know there's nothing I can do to change his mind, stop him, and reorient him. And you two!" He started for Laura and Koga. "Sometimes you're worse than the narrator!"

"So you said," Koga remarked.

They watched as Le Croix bounded down the station platform, growing smaller as he approached its far end, almost swallowed by shadows. A moment later a high-pitched alarm sounded and the car in which they had traveled, levitating feet from the ground, crashed to the tube floor, rolled on its side, its interior lights dimming, then dying. Le Croix came bounding back, his boots smacking, laces untied and swinging freely. "I found a switch in a ticket-booth, thought it was for a lift." He stepped to the edge of the tube, surveyed the wreck at the bottom. "Damn! You know, they should label those switches."

"It was the end of the road, anyway," Koga said, standing, brushing invisible dust from his pant legs. Laura held his elbow. Koga withdrew a handkerchief from his pocket, wet it with vodka, handed it to Strand and said, "Wipe the blood out of your ears."

Strand took it, thanked him.

"Okay, unless you want to climb over a mountain of bones, this is our only way up." Le Croix pointed to a narrow ramp littered with crumpled papers and office furniture. The ramp, which led to a poorly lit passage, was badly cracked and one wall was partially buckled, spilling rocks and dirt, "And sorry about your little friend." A blue solution was dripping from Strand's pocket.

Strand's eyes brimmed with panic. He slowly reached into his pocket, pulled out the dented casing of the love program, held it reverently in his hands. The program's blue lifeblood ran between his fingers, turned to vapor. The occasion was attended by a solemnity of which it wasn't worthy, but they all bowed their heads, anticipating the geyser-like rage that would soon erupt from him. Then there was a sharp clatter as the program hit the floor, broke in half, its sparkling guts exposed.

"She wasn't that good, anyway," Strand said, snickering. The others erupted into howls of laughter, fueled by relief, surprise and, perhaps, the sneaking suspicion that the levity afforded by the episode would be short-lived.



8:33 ^{PM} (LST): The narrow passage from the station to central Dunstan was once a utility duct, with colored wires hanging in bunches from the ceiling, some occasionally sparking, filling the passage with cold, blue light. They soon emerged into Dunstan Dome, the peak of which was obscured by the lunar night, only its intricate ribbing illuminated by starlight.

NARRATOR: *They stood on a parapet. Below them outstretched Dunstan, a once vibrant city carved from rock, inserted into canyons, integrated with craters. It was a marvel of engineering...*

“My engineering,” Koga said aloud.

“Don’t humor him,” Laura suggested.

...paralleled only by the cities of Mare Crisium. Most of the city sat in darkness, unpowered, but in the distance...

“There! It’s so god damn dark. But look, Dunstan Center—the lights are on.” Strand grabbed Le Croix by the collar, pointed in the direction from which light seemed to be emanating.

“Lights of a sort,” Laura said, pushing past them, peering into the distance with her emerald-green eyes, the pupils dilating then contracting mechanically, spinning into pinpoints, then enlarging, the sockets almost completely black. “It’s burning.”

“Burning” Koga exclaimed. And on wisps of legs darted past them, down a gangway that ran parallel to the parapet. “No!” they could hear him shout. He hoisted himself over the lip of the parapet and was gone.

“If it’s not one thing, then it’s another!” Strand complained and then tore down the gangway after Koga.

“Should we follow them?” Laura asked Le Croix.

“No.” He peered over the edge of the parapet, down a sheer wall. Whatever fire was tearing through Dunstan Center had already raged through the quadrant of the city over which they stood. Charred husks of buildings loomed in various states of collapse. Black water ran in the streets. “I’m beginning to get homesick. I say we stuff our pockets with bottles and stay on the high road, travel

the perimeter of Dunstan.” Le Croix took Laura’s hands, raised them to his face, and inspected the nails, “Cherry red?”

“Ha! Candy apple. Close.” He kissed her on the tip of her nose.

“What was that for?” she asked.

“Know how I got hooked up with this guy?” Le Croix gestured over his shoulder with his thumb in the direction into which Strand fled. “We were kids. I think we were maybe two of a total of ten or eleven or maybe twelve, all about the same age, all the sons and daughters of security personnel—glorified caretakers. We had the run of the Dome. I bet you remember when we ran circles around your legs, poached baggage, hid among the Inntergalactic palms pointing toy guns at what few guests still arrived, mostly enterprise liquidators.” Le Croix boosted himself atop the parapet, looked up into refracted starlight. He pulled out his gun, squeezed one eye shut, aimed and pretended to fire into the glass. “They’re cages, these domes.”

“I remember you. Better than the others,” Laura said. “I remember your thick, blonde hair, never brushed, rarely cut. I remember.” She looked up, too, trying to parse the dome’s ribs out of the ether. “Inside or outside, Frank—it’s a cage.”

“Grab a bottle of Czar,” Le Croix said, slipping off the parapet, “It’s going to be a long night.”



9:11 ^{PM} (LST): For a man of Koga’s age, he was fast. Strand waded through a thick black river of brackish water, calling Koga’s name. Floating in the water were radios, porous composite beams, bones, extruded glass, bunches of optic filaments in melted sheaths. What a mess, Strand thought. And where were the alleged miners—the rogue squatters. All around him the low-profile housing units called warrens were groaning under their own weight, shifting on their anchors. Live, snarling wires hung from posts, occasionally connecting with the water, sizzling in place, arcs of electricity leaping into the air, desperately seeking conductors. I am a conductor, Strand thought.

“Koga” Strand called.

“Over here!” Koga stood atop a tipped over kiosk. “I think we’re too late,” he said.

“Too late for *what?*” Strand asked, exasperation creeping into his voice.

“I tried to tell you, what I heard, at the antenna. You weren’t listening. It’s Stack, the one you want—the one Baxter wanted. Well, what I heard, or what I gathered, is Stack is a Tanaka agent.”

“A Tanaka agent...”

“One of Saito Tanaka’s men: Tanaka & Associates. He’s an exterminator. They don’t want warm bodies at Ajita. I bet this sounds perfectly logical to you. You’ve never been Earthside. You don’t know what it means to breathe fresh air. You’ve inherited all of your father’s prerogatives. I think we’re witnessing a land grab. Maybe Ajita sits on choice real estate. Maybe they want to reopen the silica mines. Either way, someone wants to devalue the property before the bidding wars start. And they certainly don’t want any witnesses. Not that you and Howdy Doody present a threat. But a witness is a witness.”

“Huh!” Strand said, pulling out his gun, scanning the area, “And the miners?”

“Pick a fate, any fate. It’s all the same. Were there miners? There were stories. If you start picking through the warrens, I think you’ll begin to stumble upon a few fetid corpses disintegrating in their armchairs. There are no answers in Ajita. There were tasks, many of which were completed. Fuzzy quotas were met, Ares Mines grew rich, Inntergalactic got a feather in its cap, and Khrushchev got a few back rubs. And that’s that. A world without context. But I have a little context—a little memory. I’m going back to Earth, and I want you to help me!”

“There’s nothing I can do, old man.” Strand sloshed to the entryway of a squat warren. So badly burned was the entryway that it resembled a black, toothless orifice. Inside was a typical compact living area, exposed, translucent pipes sagging from the ceiling. Panels of shattered photo-catalyzers hung like broken picture frames from the walls. Still intact but partly submerged were a straight-backed chair and round table on top of which stood a stack of partly scorched books. Strand picked up the book that lay on top. Its front cover disintegrated. He blew away a layer of ash, revealed handwriting, not print. It was a journal, something he’d never kept. Had he thoughts worthy of a journal? He ran his fingers over the lettering, imagined a pen pressing into the paper. A journal, a life: *I WAS*. He felt the weight of the journal in his hand, the heft of thoughts made plain. His sister kept a diary. After that fateful day on the tube when she lost her sight, she used a

Dictaphone and their mother later transcribed her daughter's thoughts by hand, in her own swirly script. What would he write? His world ended at the edges of Ajita's exterior dome. He had placed his hands on the cold barrier that separated Ajita from the vacuum; felt the glass panels vibrate beneath his hands; heard the dome's fluid joints flex. What could he write? What was the measure of a life?

"Strand," Koga whispered from the entranceway, barely audible, but Strand still jumped, startled, the journal falling from his hands, splashing in the knee-deep water. Reading his thoughts, "We can leave this place. All of us: you, Le Croix, the girl—to Earth, to Shibuya. You'd see things that would stretch the imagination. Vast oceans, towering cities, blue skies, turtle doves."

"Turtle Doves" Strand exclaimed.

Koga waded across the room, stood before the table, picked up a book, and opened it, its spine crackling. "Ah, the *Mare Crisium Fairy Book*—essential reading. They used to blame the misfortunes of Ajita on the Moon: 'Oh, what an awful mistress, the Moon, so cruel,' they'd say. But there was never anything particularly bad about the Moon."

"I know the book—" Strand started.

"Of course you do! Every Ajitan child was expected to learn it, recite it, and know it by heart—"

"Koga, it's freezing, and you're turning blue. Let's keep moving, get out of this cave and head toward the fires."

"And what then, Roy?" Koga asked, "We're marked, all of us. They can't sell the ship if it's still got rats. Look—" Koga began to flip through the book. Soot-colored water dripped onto his forehead. He wiped it away, thumbed over pages. "Here, 'The Hiding of the Chapel Bell.'"

Strand grabbed Koga by the arm, dragged him toward the entrance. He didn't resist. Back in the flooded streets, still dragging Koga behind, Strand recited the story as he remembered it. "The men of Ajita—"

"Taurus," Koga corrected him.

"But that's not how we learned it. The men of Ajita—sometimes it was the miners, sometimes it was the administrators—they found something at Isis, deep in a crater. They called it the 'Church Bell'—"

"Chapel Bell," Koga said.

“Right, Chapel Bell. It was enormous—half the width of the Regency Lobby and it was *alive*. The earth rumbled around it, shaking rocks loose from the valley walls. The men said it looked like the lid of a giant saucepan, but filled with light to a depth of a meter. They say it rang like a bell when touched. Half the men wanted to destroy it immediately, said it was a threat. The others wanted to hide it, use it as a bargaining chip—”

“This must be your father’s version of the story,” Koga interrupted.

“Grandfather’s version,” Strand corrected, “According to my father, he was there—at Isis. He saw it, touched it, heard it...” And then a shot rang out and the water in front of Strand and Koga dimpled, rippled, a bullet seeking the city floor. Strand grabbed Koga by his collar, pulled him into a narrow alley, “Stack?”

“Could be,” Koga affirmed.

“We’ll have to burrow deeper into the warrens, stay in the alleys.” Strand poked his head out into the street, scanned the parapets, saw nothing.



10:10 ^{PM} (LST): When the shots rang out, Le Croix and Laura were descending a ladder into an access tunnel that ran parallel to the warrens. It too was filled with water. “Where is the water coming from, Frank?”

Le Croix patted the wall, said, “Other side.” He pointed up at the crisscrossing network of pipes. “It’s the Dunstan oxygen plant. It must be down, otherwise this water would have been turned into oxygen and hydrogen. He ran his hand across the rock studded with rebar. “Somewhere this retaining wall has failed. It’s funny, but Wiltshire ducted its air over from Dunstan—looks like we were about to suffocate. No, let me put it another way: It looks like we are about to suffocate. If the domes are as leaky as they appear and if the oxygen plant is out of commission...”

“And the fires,” Laura exclaimed, “They’ll eat what oxygen is left”

“Probably,” Le Croix held out his hand. Laura handed him a bottle of Czar. He uncapped it, took a swig. “And on top of that, it sounds like there’s a gunfight up top. Odds say Strand started it. Want to bet?” He handed her the bottle.



10:45 ^{PM} (LST): Strand and Koga stayed low, crept Dunstan Center could be seen reflected in the reflective matrices of the dome. The reflected light was dull, the fires dying.

“Finish the story,” Koga whispered over his shoulder.

“My grandfather’s version?”

“Whichever.”

“So they decided to hide it, but not before a fight broke out between the two factions. One night, a handful of the men that wanted to destroy the bell rigged it with explosives. Something went wrong. The explosives blew before they were detonated, killing the men, leaving nary a dent on the bell. The men that wanted to hide the bell were now in control.” Strand stopped, cupped his hands, dunked them in the water. “Think its drinkable?” he asked Koga.

Koga observed the husk of a corpse bob to the surface, float by. “I wouldn’t.”

“Thirsty,” Strand complained. They carried on. “So they excavated the bell. And once excavated it became dislodged from the landscape, seemed to wriggle free of the valley’s rock face, began to float. Although massive, the bell didn’t resist force. And they hid it—right under the noses of Ares Mines. But I don’t know where they hid it.”

“I do,” Koga said, matter-of-factly. “It’s at the Temples of Nansen.”

“The ruins,” Strand inquired, incredulous.

“It’s not all ruins, Strand. The temples are hardened. They stretch for miles. It wasn’t just a fairy tale. I’ve seen the bell. It’s a ship and it works.”

“And this should mean something to me because...”

“Because it’s our ticket out of here,” Koga exclaimed, “Ajita is dying and we’re going to die with it.”

“You’re saying it’s a ship. And if it is a ship, you know how to fly it?” In spite of the circumstances—the waist-high water, the thinning interior atmosphere of Dunstan Dome, the bloated corpses floating by on their backs—Strand began to laugh. He tried to stifle it, but it rose in his throat like a giant gas-bubble, popped and the laughter became uncontrollable, until he grew faint. Stars began to parade across his vision and he pitched over into the fetid water.



11:11 ^{PM} (LST): “You were telling me how you became Strand’s sidekick—”

“How Strand became *my* sidekick, you mean, right?”

“Of course,” Laura responded, smirking.

“Hell, there were like twelve of us kids, six after the fevers that swept the complexes after Brezhnev’s visit: one girl, five boys, all around the same age. Strand and I became pals while fighting over the girl. She was a little younger, Japanese, parents both dead. She became a little ward of the group, but she was stuck on Strand, tagged along with him everywhere and he was sweet on her, too. You look at Strand now, how warped he is, angry, upside-down—he wasn’t always like that. Hard to believe, right? Well, come on, you must have watched all of this, the drama—watched from the lobby.”

“Some,” Laura acknowledged. “Some things were of more interest to me than others, like you, for instance. But I also enjoyed—and maybe that’s the wrong word—a different perspective than you did; than your parents did; than visitors to Ajita did. Maybe because of what I am, I knew you possessed less value to Ajita than you thought you did. You were all droids of a sort, content in isolation, poked and prodded by your taskmasters, as children, as adults, even now. There was never anything particularly special about Ajita—it was one of dozens of mines on the 33rd parallel. Now look at it.”

“I know what’s out there. We used to talk about it as kids—about Earth. But everything was so sketchy. It’s still sketchy, ill-formed, as my mother used to say: *that’s an ill-formed idea, son.* I mean, the world inside the glass wasn’t much different than the world outside. We heard about the mines from our fathers, but never saw the mines; heard about the miners but never saw the miners. All of the technology by which we are surrounded tells a story I don’t understand: Who made it? Why? I remember gardens in the exterior domes. Then there were no gardens. Freighters would drop supplies instead. That was the natural order. It had to be. No one offered explanations. That was just ‘how the world worked.’”

“In the lobby, carved into stone around the perimeter of the atrium is the Latin phrase *Veneficus Fiddles Operor Non Lascivio Hic.* Know what that means?” Laura asked le Croix.

He shook his head.

“Magic fiddles don’t play here.”
 “You’re telling me!” Le Croix confirmed.



WEDNESDAY, 12:13 ^{AM} (LST): The grade of the city streets began to rise and soon Strand and Koga had emerged from the cold water, were dripping on a dais in the city square. Around them, buildings smoldered and tendrils of blue fire licked walls, curled around corners, leapt from windowsill to windowsill, doorway to doorway. Not a soul stirred. “So much for a hero’s welcome,” Strand remarked. A thick layer of smoke hovered around their feet, swirling, forming eddies. Strand kicked at the smoke with a wet boot. It dispersed.

“Stack doesn’t seem very ambitious, does he?” Koga commented, bending over, wringing water from the cuffs of his pants. And in answer to his question, another shot rang out, ricocheting off a nearby lamppost. This time Strand had seen the discharge—a pale yellow burst of light just above and beyond the rooftops, maybe 100 meters away.

“Crouch behind this wall. Don’t move. I’m going to try and flank the shooter, hopefully before he finds you.”

Strand crept along the wall that ringed the dais, went down a short flight of steps, turned into a smoke-filled alley. The alley emptied into a narrow street. To the right, on its side, lay a dome shuttle, its windows broken and a skeleton flopped over its control panel. Strand turned left, kept his back to the wall, inched forward.

They never knew the horrors that had befallen Dunstan. They had been the Princes of Wiltshire, doing Baxter’s bidding, poaching the mad hangers-on, managing the hotel bar, drinking prodigiously...

“Hey,” Strand whispered. “I’m not sure this is the time. I need to concentrate.”

Fair enough, replied the narrator.

At his feet, a manhole cover began to rattle in its seat. Strand drew his gun. The manhole cover was lifted from below and Strand could barely discern the whites of a set of eyes staring out at him. They were soon joined by a glow from an unnaturally white set of teeth.

The voice that came from the underground was instantly recognizable: “Give a pal a hand?”

Strand knelt before the manhole cover, put his pointer finger to his lips, “Don’t talk. Be very quiet.” He lifted as Le Croix pushed, then carefully set the cover aside, helped his friends from the hole. “Stack, he’s on the parapet.”

“*He’s* the shooter?” Le Croix asked, raising his eyebrows.

Strand nodded.

Le Croix shook his head, shrugged, and said to Laura, “I lost the bet.”

“He’s an exterminator, says Koga. He’s trying to sterilize Ajita, maybe for a new buyer. Who knows, but Koga’s got a way out of here, or so he says, and I’m kind of inclined to believe him.”

“Whatever you say, boss. Don’t have much of a choice anyway—sounds like we have imminent trouble.” Klaxons were ringing throughout the complex, reverberating around the dome’s frame. “That’s the air-quality alarm.”

“When you say exterminator...” Laura said.

“As in exterminator, yes, a people-exterminator, maybe extra points for droids.” Strand winked at Laura. “Are you two drunk?”

Laura fished in her bag for a bottle of Czar, found one, offered it to Strand.

“Nah,” he said. “I’ve got enough nerve, for now. I recommend a diversion—”

“That sounds like an excellent idea!” The booming voice came from the end of the street. A man stood swathed in smoke, gray tendrils wrapping around his legs. He had a wispy beard, a thin face. His hair was patchy, falling out in places, clumping on the shoulders of his greatcoat. His legs were spread. His arms were at his sides, a gun hanging loosely in one hand.

“Stack!?” Strand called into the smoke.

“Good to see you again, Strand,” Stack said, his voice strained. He began to cough, his lungs rattling. He spit a wad of orange phlegm. It made an audible splat sound when it hit the street. “I didn’t think you guys left the Regency. Who’s the old man? He wasn’t on my list.” Stack started to walk toward them. Le Croix drew his gun.

“Name’s Koga—an engineer,” Strand explained, placing his hand on Le Croix’s wrist. He whispered, “Put it down.” Le Croix did so, but reluctantly.

They listened to Stack's boot heels clack, grow louder. Moments later he stood before them. And he was a terrible sight to behold, with blood pooled in the corners of his eyes, encrusted around his nose. The tip of his nose and hands looked badly burned. "I had an accident," he said. "It wasn't in my itinerary." Stack smiled, revealing gums that were black, holes where teeth should have been. He took the gun by its muzzle, passed it handle-first to Strand. Strand took it. "I had some trouble in the tube on my way over from Wiltshire, made sort of an ordeal out of the rest of my mission."

"Which was what?" asked Laura.

Stack squinted at Laura, the smile vanishing from his face. "I am a destroyer of worlds!" he shouted. Laura stepped behind Le Croix. "Tanaka wanted the oxygen plant decommissioned, for one. Their intelligence is not what you might think. Ares has been bombarding Ajita with refuse capsules for years, trying to create a random disaster. That's how their policy works—insured for Acts of God and Unprecedented Disasters. Something else happened, however." He gestured to the surrounding buildings, waving the smoke out of his face. "These were your neighbors." He shuffled closer, poked Le Croix in the chest with a blue finger with a black fingernail. "Don't know what, though. Oh, and if it's any consolation, I wasn't aiming at you back there. Look at me—like I'll be around long enough to collect my bounty." He chuckled, probed his gums with his tongue and grunted, spit out a tooth.

Strand dug a thiopental stick out of his pocket, handed it to Stack. Stack snatched it from Strand greedily, held it to his nose, sniffed it, closed his eyes, "Oh, boy. This makes it all worthwhile. Give me a light, would you?" Strand lit it and Stack took a deep drag, let out a long, pleased sigh. "May peace reign," he said.



1:03 ^{AM} (LST): Koga sat on the dais in Dunstan Center, his knees pulled to his chest. He was shivering. Laura placed her hand on his shoulder and he turned, startled. His eyes widened at the sight of the man in the greatcoat that just flashed him a toothless grin.

"This is Koga," Le Croix said. "Koga, meet Stack, our friendly executioner."

“A pleasure,” Stack said, running his tongue over his gums, wincing in pain.

“Radiation poisoning,” Koga deduced, “The tubes?”

“The tubes,” Stack confirmed.

A speaker box hanging from a lamp post began to squawk and a female voice announced an air-purity advisory for the good residents of Dunstan.

Stack grunted, spit out the stub of the thiopental stick, seemed to notice the clumps of hair on his shoulders for the first time. With his frost-bitten hands he brushed at the hairs, watched them sail through the smoky air, settle at his feet. “Well, that’s an understatement if I ever heard one: ‘air-purity.’”

“Agreed,” said Koga. “I’m beginning to feel heavy, sluggish. Tell them our plan of attack.” He nodded at Strand.

“I wouldn’t call it a plan, exactly,” Strand began. He related the story about Chapel Bell, assured them that it was, indeed, real, but didn’t relate his doubts about whether they could commandeer it or not. “It appears we don’t have an alternative,” and as if to drive home the point, the speaker box began to squawk again, followed by a shrill alarm.

“This is a plan that is no plan,” Le Croix complained.

“There’s no telling what the air is like down there,” Koga said. “But there’s a lava tube that extends from beneath the Dunstan superstructure to a surface seal, maybe three-hundred meters from Nansen. We’ll need suits for that last leg.”

“And how do we access the lava tube?” Strand asked.

“From beneath the oxygen plant,” Koga answered. “The tubes are used for hydrogen ducting.”

“Now wait just one minute,” Le Croix said, wiping at a trickle of blood from his nose. “I have other fish to fry.” He looked meaningfully at Strand. “We have fish to fry.” Laura shot Le Croix a plaintive glance, her brow knitting together.

“He’s right,” Strand confirmed. “Before we do anything else, we have to kill the narrator, even if it means certain death.”

“That’s absurd!” Koga interrupted.

Le Croix’s eyes blazed. He reached out for Koga and picked him up off the ground, shouted, “Listen to me little man! He must be eliminated. If we don’t rip his heart out, pluck out his eyes, he’ll follow us. He’ll dig into us and sink his nails into our flesh!”

“Down” Koga shouted. Le Croix dropped him. “Listen to reason! There’s no killing the narrator, don’t you see? Kill this one and another will spring up in its place. And it might be worse; it might speak in tongues.”

“He’s right,” Laura pled. “Please listen to him, Frank—”

“They call you *Frank?*” Stack snorted. “We could put it to a vote, but lord knows what a waste of time that would be. I knew it would end like this. I knew I’d die in an argument—poisoned and screaming.” He wiggled his remaining front tooth with his tongue. “Hey, places like this have a Tooth Fairy?”

“Oh, Fortuna” Strand exclaimed. He pushed between Stack and Laura, bolted across the dais, disappeared through a smoking doorway over which hung a still blinking neon sign that read:

B-A-R

“I see we have our priorities straight—” Laura began.

“Ducks in a row, as they say,” said Koga. “All things considered, not a bad idea.”

“I’ll help him,” said Stack. “I could use a stiff drink. Probably be my last.” Stack dragged himself across the dais, into the bar, trailed by the tails of his greatcoat.

In the entranceway to the bar, Stack cleared his throat. Strand jumped at the sound, popped up from behind a fire-blackened bar. On the floor, stools smoldered. From holes in the walls flames emerged, then just as quickly disappeared, as if they were inspecting the bar but were disappointed by what they saw.

“Anything that says ‘Czar,’ take it,” Strand said. “Most of the bottles are broken.” He held one up, its neck shattered.

Stack crunched across the melted and debris-strewn floor, approached the bar. Strand had lined up several candidates, all full, some bearing the proud visage of Peter the Great. Stack picked one up, raised it over his head. “Strand,” he said. Strand, who was hunched over, rummaging through cabinets, stood, faced Stack. The bottle connected with his neck and Strand collapsed to the floor. “You poor, gullible fools,” Stack announced, his only audience Strand’s motionless body. He placed one bottle of Czar in each pocket of his coat, carried another in his ugly hand.

“We got lucky,” Stack said, mounting the dais, presenting the bottle of Czar to the group. “Strand’s been overwhelmed by greed.

You'll never get him out of that bar—it'll be like ripping a kid from his mother's breast." He tossed the bottle of vodka to Laura. She didn't anticipate it, flailed in the air, couldn't find purchase. The bottle crashed to the ground, exploded.

"The waste" Koga shouted.

"Exactly" Stack affirmed, drawing a telescopic electric prod from under his greatcoat. It extended, surging to life, slammed into Le Croix's stomach. Le Croix's body simultaneously stiffened and launched through the air, slamming into a lamppost. He landed in a heap, shuddered, sobbed.

Stack approached a panic-stricken Laura, grabbed her by her auburn hair and forced her to her knees. Koga leapt onto Stack's back but was batted away like a fly. Stack reached for a piece of bottle glass, put it to Laura's throat. Her eyes grew wide, the optic motors twisting the pupils into pinpoints. He began to dig into her trachea with the glass. Red fluid emerged, trickled down her neck, dying her shirt.

"Hi-ya" Koga screamed, launching his heel into the side of Stack's head. It made a dull but meaningful thudding sound upon contact. Stack rolled to the ground and Koga jumped onto his chest, driving his boney fists into Stack's Adam's-apple, pummeling his eye-sockets, then tearing at the remaining hair on his head. Blood spurted from Stack's mouth, his body convulsed and then he lay motionless.

Le Croix crawled on hands and knees to Laura, took her in his arms, inspected her wound; it wasn't deep. She managed a smile for him: "Even if it were life-threatening, it wouldn't be life-threatening. I'm okay, love." Le Croix squeezed her, pet her head, kissed her red, luscious lips.

"Strand" Koga called, climbing off Stack, kicking him one last time in his lifeless stomach.

Strand stumbled out of the bar, hung onto a fire-twisted fence, waved weakly. Behind him in a wheeled cooler cart were piled unopened bottles of Czar Vodka. They each took one, sat cross-legged in a circle on the dais, rested.



5:43 ^{AM} (LST): Overhead, dawn broke, revealing the intricate network of ribbing of which Dunstan Dome was composed—the matrices of glass and titanium, the byzantine interconnections of

refractive filament joinery that tied pane to pane, rib to rib. Tired, thirsty, anxious, Strand and Le Croix, Koga and Laura, looked up, were transfixed by the dazzling display of light reflected, magnified, fed through conjunctions of mirrors, beamed throughout the complex, to rooftops and from rooftops to now dead photocatalyzers. The golden orange light was heavily diffused through the smoke-laden air, took on the quality of an aurora, fluxing, stretching, pulsating with erratic pressure changes throughout the dome as the thinning atmosphere was heated, deflected by the arcing superstructure, replaced by cooler air from the crater-city's floor—the process repeated over and over again.

It was Koga that broke the spell. "We don't have much time."

Rattling behind them on squeaky wheels as they descended from Dunstan Center to the dome's west wall was the cooler. It bounced down steps, bottles clanging, rammed into sharp corners, threatened to overturn, but as if by divine intervention, remained upright. At the west wall they were forced to crawl on hands and knees through a narrow service tunnel that traversed the west wall, leading to the oxygen plant, frigid water at neck-level. "Protect those bottles at all costs!" Le Croix gasped from the front of the group, swallowing and spitting mouthfuls of water.

Behind them, the sound of the Klaxons was fading. From the service tunnel they emerged into another brightly lit dome with buttressed walls. The glass panels of which the dome was composed had been doped with a compound that caused them to tint upon impact with solar radiation, but the panels appeared to be broken. They were forced to shield their eyes, squint through blinding sunlight. "The domes are depressurizing and the joinery must be cracking," said Koga, "Very bad."

Strand dug into his pocket, pulled out a handful of dripping thiopental sticks. "I was going to quit anyway."

Le Croix grinned, fiddled with his beard and produced a long black, sticky stick. "I owe you this. He handed the stick to Strand who held it between his teeth, smiled. Le Croix lit it for him.

In the center of the oxygen plant stood an enormous aquamarine-colored piece of machinery with a photo-sensitive skin. From its far end extended dozens of blue pipes that ran in all directions, disappearing into the rock walls. On the end nearest to them stood a raised deck with towering banks of control panels, all riddled with deep, scorched cavities.

“We can find suits in the maintenance area,” Koga said, leading them through a flooded alcove and into a room filled with lockers. “If it fits, wear it.”

“These are supposed to be unisex?” Laura chuckled, squirming with difficulty into a straight-legged spacesuit. “They don’t have hips!”

“Hey, if it’s any consolation,” Strand said. “Looks like these guys didn’t have dicks. I can’t fit either!”

“You wish, buddy boy!” Le Croix rejoined.



6:45 ^{AM} (LST): The lava tube was almost perfectly cylindrical, with smooth vitrified walls down which water ran in rivulets. Sealed in their suits, the group was forced to speak through microphones.

“None of the tanks are topped off, so keep the visors up and the oxygen off until we get to the seal,” Koga said. “This is really bad air, though—rotten—too much nitrogen.”

A fluorescent purple fluid ran at their feet, glowed and splashed on the walls as they walked, “Any idea what that is?” Le Croix asked. No one had an answer, or if they had a suspicion, they didn’t give it a voice.

“Okay,” Strand said. “We get to the Chapel Bell. Somehow we are able to board. Who drives this thing?”

Koga chuckled. “Just leave it to me. You’ll see. It’s not exactly what you think.”

“And what exactly do you think I think it is?” Strand ventured.

“A flying saucer. Which isn’t to say it *isn’t* a flying saucer.” Koga began to gasp. He pulled down his visor, pressed a button on the front of the suit. They watched him take a deep breath, exhale, fogging the visor’s glass. His voice crackled over the radio: “Couldn’t breathe. Much better now. Oh! And you know why the stuff you’re slopping through glows purple?”

They shook their heads.

“Ha! It’s ionized nitrogen!” The meaning and apparently the humor was lost on his compatriots. He noticed and explained further: “The lava tubes were turned into the Ajita sewer system—that’s irradiated sewage, HAHAHA!”

“You knew this?” Laura asked, her hand now covering her mouth and nose.

“It’s my job to know these things,” Koga answered. “It’s also the only relatively safe way to Nansen.”



8:13 ^{AM} (LST): The seal to the lunar surface was badly dented and was held in place with magnetic locks. “How do you propose we open this?” Le Croix asked Koga.

“Put on your masks, kids,” Koga said. They did. Koga approached a panel on the wall attached to which was a U-shaped lever. He held on with both hands, groaned, managed to flip it into an upward position. A red hydrogen bulb came to life over the seal, blinked. The lava tube began to vibrate and the large vacuum sealed door twisted on an invisible hinge a few degrees, hissed loudly, and as an energetic rush of air swept the group off its feet, the door swung out and sideways while behind them a security wall descended from the ceiling, protecting Ajita from the world to which they were now exposed: the surface of the Moon.



8:33 ^{AM} (LST): The valley seemed to stretch into an endless horizon, shielded to the north and south by towering, mile-high mountains, the peaks of which shown like radiant obelisks.

“It’s a desert!” Le Croix complained, huffing through his microphone.

“It’s beautiful,” countered Laura. She knelt in her awkward suit, scooped up soil with her gloved hand and watched it sift through her fingers. She picked up another glove-full, threw it up into the air. “It’s snowing!” The particulate matter seemed to hang in the air, catch light.

“The Temples are about 300 meters ahead. These suits might be tunnel-rated but no way of telling if they’re blocking solar radiation. We need to get a move-on!” Koga leaned forward, stepped past the group, and led them toward the horizon.

NARRATOR: Strand looked back at Ajita—the proud outlines of its ranging dome complex, the scintillating summits, and the polished glass. And inside sat the slumping interior domes, their degradation unobvious from the exterior—the depravity it carefully concealed. Lodged in a northern facet of the Ajita complex was a refuse capsule, caught in the dome’s strong webbing like a

fly in a spider web. She, Ajita, had certainly suffered indignities, but as Laura said, she was but one daughter of the 33rd parallel, all offspring of greed.

“He’s right, you know,” they heard Strand say over the speakers in their ears. “The narrator—his observations...”

No one answered and Strand took it as confirmation of his sentiments. The wheels of the cooler were sinking into the soft surface of the Moon, catching on rocks. It slowed him down and he was falling behind. “Wait up!” he called and remembered he didn’t need to shout; they were chained together with the radios.

NARRATOR, cont’d.: *Strand was thirteen when Valerie got sick. The bug spread among the women quickly, then the men, felling them one by one, ruthlessly, showing no mercy. Tube-travel between Dunstan and Wiltshire was banned. Rumors spread that Brezhnev had ordered a biological attack; that Ajita had become an unmanageable expense. The claims were unsubstantiated but the rising death-toll lent credence to the assumptions. Desperate attempts were made to contact the Japanese and Russian consulates, even the Americans, but to no avail; Ajita had been abandoned.*

Strand never left Valerie’s side as she was racked by chills and drenching night-sweats. Her family gone, Strand tried to protect Valerie. He nursed her, held a vigil day and night, and paced beside her bed, spooned water into her mouth. In the end, it was hopeless. No one rallied. No one emerged from the delirium into which the bug forced its victims; it was a long, steady slide into the waiting maw of death. Strand buried Valerie in the now inaccessible courtyard of the Regency—a courtyard scarified by solar radiation—a sea of plants undone by the vacuum, turned to dust, sucked through the failing joinery of the Ajita exoskeleton.

Where were they going? Strand wondered: From what, into what? Were they being foolhardy? He stole another long look over his shoulder at Ajita. She was growing smaller now, sinking beneath the ridges and buttes that marched around the perimeter of Vale Sol. In his ear, a voice crackled: “It’s a tomb, Roy,” Laura said. “It doesn’t deserve your mourning.”

He agreed. Strand doubled up around his hand the rope with which he pulled the cart, started to bound forward, the cart bouncing violently behind him.



9:19 ^{AM} (LST): The Temples of Nansen were wonders of excavation. Cranes towered unused above a series of interlocking towers constructed of cut stone and titanium joists. Narrow silicate-web windows reached several stories from the foundations to spires that poked into the firmament. A long, ovular entranceway was accessible from a series of laser-cut steps with glass insets. Le Croix, Strand and Laura all carried the liquor cart, trying desperately to maintain their balance. A bottle of Czar bounced loose, fell end over end down the long flight of steps, came to a standstill in a furrow of sand. "Think of it as an offering to the Gods," Le Croix said.

Koga was waving from the oval entrance. "In here," he called. They dropped the heavy cart. Inside was a featureless space. Shafts of light shown through the banks of narrow windows and from a domed cupola with hexagonal windows. On Koga's suit, a yellow light was blinking. Laura pointed. "Oxygen," Koga said. "Not much time. It's down here," he said. Koga ran across the floor made of molded glass cubes to what looked like a narthex and down a spiral staircase choked with multicolored cables. They picked up the cart again, followed Koga into the corkscrewing staircase. At the bottom they beheld an extraordinary sight: an eggshell shaped room with smooth walls the color of onyx. Hovering over the floor was a monstrous disk from which was emanating a low hum that made their bones vibrate. Its skin had depth and seemed to pulsate at irregular intervals, as though in time to one or several interior hearts. "It's beating in time to our hearts!" Koga exclaimed. "That's what it does!"

"What do we do?" Laura asked.

Koga crawled beneath the disk like a mechanic, the oxygen pack on his back forcing him to work awkwardly on his side. He appeared to be pressing on the hovering behemoth's underside. "Come on," he called. They got on their hands and knees, watched as Koga climbed into the disk through a round hatch. They followed. Laura peered inside from below, saw only inky blackness. Koga's steamed up visor appeared. "Hand me the liquor bottles," he said. Le Croix passed them one by one to Laura and Laura in turn passed them to Koga. Operation complete, they all crawled inside. Koga passed the palm of his glove over an irregularly-shaped

patch of glowing fiber filaments and the hatch resolved into a solid, sealing the interior disk from the Temples of Nansen. The yellow light on Koga's suit was blinking rapidly and he seemed panicked. He rushed from one end of the disk to the other, touching surfaces. Then he was on his hands and knees. Dozens of thick hair-like filaments sprouted from the floor, glowed a deep red. He unlocked the safety bolts of his glove, twisted it off and pushed his bare hand into the filaments. Bright light exploded throughout the disc, divided into quadrants drawn by blue beams and each quadrant divided into segments, conforming to the shape of their bodies. Koga held his masked head in his hands. He depressed a button and the visor sprang open. "No air!" he gasped. A loud boom erupted from below the disk and an ear-piercing hiss issued from slits in the walls. Simultaneously their ears popped. They watched Koga's face. A smile began to spread from ear to ear. "It's working!" he shouted, "Air!"

They unfastened their helmets, spun them off their pivots, let them crash to the floor, and took deep breaths.

"What now?" asked Le Croix. He was closely inspecting the surfaces of the disk's interior, running his hands over the walls which seemed to be sweating.

"It's condensation," Koga explained. "Whatever you lose—sweat, urine—the disk will absorb, give back to you. Feelings, too! But first things first: What now!" He stood, unzipped the suit from under his right arm, across his midsection and then down to the interior of his left leg, stepped out of it gingerly, sighed. "Now we need to talk."

The others took off their suits, heaped them in a pile. Strand opened a bottle of Czar, passed it to the group.

Koga was wringing his hands, clearly trying to formulate his thoughts. He began: "Chapel Bell is a contextual machine. It piggybacks on the experiences of its users—utilizes the user's memory as a map and individual memories as mnemonic clues...for context, placement. It is not so much a question of how it works but that it works at all. All of your contexts are embedded in Ajita. You are effectively useless, all of you. And Laura is just an unknown quantity—there's no way to know how the disk would interface with a droid. But were it to access your contexts—" Koga pointed at Le Croix and Strand. "We'd end up back in Ajita, probably at the Regency Bar. That is, the disk parses the sum of

your experience in the dimension in which your life unfolded and flits about therein, see?"

They didn't.

Koga rubbed the bridge of his nose with his fingers. "Long story short, we need to get off the Moon and there is only one context through which the Chapel Bell can do that: mine. But as I see it, there might be a catch. My Earthside context is anchored in 1946 Tokyo and it's very probable that the Chapel Bell will seize upon that particular context."

Le Croix recalled the mural of Shibuya Station—the crowds, the smiles, the unnaturally blue sky—a world without domes. "You'll have no objection from me," Le Croix said, wagging his head back and forth adamantly. He imagined standing with Laura in the rain, holding an umbrella over her head, listening to the rain patter at their feet.

"What about you, Strand," Koga queried.

"I don't know what to expect, Koga." He imagined Valerie's deserted grave; he would plant a bed of flowers, a different variety for each year that had passed since her death. "But you have no objections from me."

"Laura?"

She looked up into Le Croix's eyes, saw the warmth there. She placed her hand on his thick beard, rubbed his chin. She looked at Koga, nodded assent.



10:10 ^{AM} (LST): Koga took off his socks, walked in bare feet to a platform that appeared to be padded with a pink gel. He knelt atop the platform, pressed his hands into the soft substance. Instantly, the pressure within the disk increased, the group's ears popped. The thumping sound on the exterior of the disk could now be heard on the interior. It was deafening. Their skin was rippling with sound waves that rolled from one end of the disk to the other and then back again, their wavelength decreasing and their frequency increasing. The optical grid that filled the interior was now entrained with the sound waves, drawing and redrawing with each successive pass. Koga bowed and placed his head on the disk's floor. A second grid of light appeared atop him, grew increasingly intricate, began to resonate, fill with what looked like projected

imagery: skyscrapers, crashing waves, bleeding suns, mechanical gadgetry, impaled horses.

As in the Dunstan tube, blood poured from their ears and noses. Their joints felt corroded and tight. A feeling of heaviness stole over them as though they were being filled with molten lead. The disk filled with fire, robbed them of sight. Le Croix reached through the thick, searing air for Laura, found her arm, pulled her into him. He felt her hand reach for his shirt, grip it. With his other hand, Le Croix sought Strand, felt his smooth snakeskin jacket, seized it, and tugged.

There was a point when the pain grew so great that Strand began to chuckle to himself. He imagined his bones and ligaments like the trusses and buttresses, joinery and hinges of Ajita, all simultaneously failing, splintering, and collapsing into a heap of glass—like a mirror into which an ugly god had peered. But then he was wet, soaking wet—flailing in sopping wet space. And he was being groped. “The Czar!” he shouted, air bubbles exploding from his mouth into a thick airless medium.



9:19^{PM} (PST), TOKYO BAY: Le Croix was kicking furiously, the disk’s dull, fading interior illumination lighting his path toward the body floating before him. He put his arms around Koga’s waist, scissor-kicked toward the black hole in the bottom of the rapidly sinking disk. As they passed through the entrance, Le Croix could see Laura’s loafers kicking, her arms pushing through the water. He watched her punch through, water roiling around her body. A moment later he pierced the surface, rolled onto his back. Strand and Laura grabbed Koga’s body, held his head above the water.

A fog horn bellowed. It was a sound that only the unconscious Koga could have identified. Below their treading feet they could see the dying glow of the disk rotate in slow circles to the bottom of what they would soon learn to call Tokyo Bay, its final resting place. The group swam for shore, zeroing in on a clump of bright white lights that hung from a cable that swung in the warm night air. They took turns supporting and pulling Koga. Once at shore, Le Croix climbed atop a jetty, got on his stomach and reached into the water for Koga, pulling him topside, rolling him onto his back. The others crawled onto land, kneeled beside Koga. They were spotlighted by a

lamppost with a broad hood. Unlike the pale green hydrogen lamps with which they were familiar, this one issued a bright white glow. Moths circled the lamp, darted into the night, returned and dove toward the light. Laura was transfixed by the performance.

Koga began to cough. Blood and water spilled from his lips. Strand slapped his cheeks, shouted his name. Koga opened his eyes, saw only stars. “No!” he managed, squeezing his eyes shut. “We failed!”

The fog horn bellowed again and Koga’s eyes snapped back open. A tear ran down his wrinkled cheek. He reached for Laura, waved her close. With his left hand he clutched Strand’s sleeve and with his right, he reached for Le Croix’s beard: “You’re never at peace,” he whispered, “in the home for which you didn’t fight. But you are princes in the place for which you forsook fear!”



× **101302MD**

“The truth is a product of perception, and it dies little deaths—every time it is related.”

—George Irwin

“The game has a name: Chaos. You don’t have to play.”

—David Duff

⁴² X - GYFU, “GIFT.” GENEROSITY BRINGS CREDIT AND HONOR, WHICH SUPPORT ONE'S DIGNITY; IT FURNISHES HELP AND SUBSISTENCE TO ALL BROKEN MEN WHO ARE DEVOID OF AUGHT ELSE. —OLD ENGLISH POEM

THE POSSESSION OF POWER, THE LACK THEREOF AND THE BRUTENESS OF HUMAN NATURE: IN DEFENSE OF THE INDIGENT, IN DEFENSE OF DAVID DUFF (JANUARY 2, 1971-OCTOBER 10, 2002)—IN MY OWN WORDS: *THE OBITUARY HE DIDN'T GET*

This is a tale about evilness and goodness. It is also a tale about race and class. More importantly, it is a tale about madness—the madness of the uneducated, underprivileged and the poor, who grow up on farms and die on farms; who are sooner remembered for their smell than their face; who have vengeance always on the mind, and who sleep on palettes and become as hard.

This is madness spawned from the fight to be acknowledged, to be rendered human in another's eye, to give birth to angels, not to the notorious; to die with assets.

Madness is the cry of the hopeless, banned from advancement, condemned to less, always less, and still less. Madness is the answer to the pleas of a man's pride. It is the signature of a man who would sooner eat his own shit than beg, a man who may be resentful of his station in life but unwilling to apologize for it.

The madman's fate is a crooked fate. It is for him alone to run from bad to worse, from one unfortunate child to many, from one bow-legged mule to another. And always the starched children, the wealthy, the silver spoons, the banker, the oil man and his wife, all catching and stealing light from him, his jurors every one.

David Duff may have been a condemned man but he reminded the inquisitor that even condemned men scream, until stopped by a bullet, or by the bottle, or by a runaway train—whichever comes first. The condemned man, the madman, he is our modern primitive—raw, unformed, and cast in an angry God's image.

David Duff was a man conceived in shadow. Alone, he represents an entire class—the white trash. In this respect, he is less than nothing in the eyes of his millennial society. All opportunity has been wrested from him. Yet, he is not but offspring of this social, economic and cultural wasteland. David represents a breed-apart that has always walked among men, without belonging totally—a breed that has huddled since time immemorial on the periphery—the lonely, shorn escarpments on the outermost edge of civilizations.

This breed, a sort of modern primitive, uncultured, uneducated, unacknowledged, is beyond common law, and in so far as laws are intended for the literate, the educated, the tax-payer, he is above the law, or so David Duff would have the inquisitor believe.

This tale is indeed a tale about evilness. It is also a tale about supremacy: white supremacy and class supremacy. It is a tale about injustice—social, racial, and economic. It is a tale about the inherent randomness in nature, the possession of power, the lack thereof, and the bruteness of human nature.

The characters in this tale are fugitives. David Duff is a fugitive from his past and the justice system. He has a gimp foot from his grand theft auto days and subsequent accidents. In this way he is inextricably united with an ugly, crude past without loyalties, and at the same time crippled by that past, unable to outrun it. David Duff is a hopeless fugitive from himself.

His family: an estranged ex-wife, Katharine, and one fat daughter, slaves to themselves and to their father; two sons, an older one and a younger one. The younger one, Brian Todd Jr., the son with whom we are concerned, is the sole fugitive in the family—a fugitive from his father.

Brian Todd Jr., violent but thoughtful, is an unordinary hero in this tale. He is the only player with a conscience. He is watchful, guarded, the only figure that finds his father's behavior objectionable, even detestable, and *acts*. He knows what a man's car means to him. A man's car, Brian Todd Jr. understands, is his bounty, his quarry, his all. It is his status, and his hive. Burn his car and you burn the man. You've kicked him where it hurts most. He is down, prone, just a man again. If the young son is different from his tribe, it is because he believes in hierarchy, because he is God-fearing, because he would sooner be judged than judge another man.

Furthermore, if Brian Todd Jr. is different, it is because he does not resent his lot in life. Nature does with men what it will. One man is born rich, another man poor, and still others in between. Try as they might men cannot intervene significantly in the natural order of things. The younger son is resigned to this understanding and he doesn't seek vengeance. In this way he is unlike his father.

Then there is the investment banker, Sutherland—his sworn enemy—who is also a fugitive. He represents the fortunate, the privileged, the sweet smelling, who are conceived in a ray of light,

but not by choice. Like the white trash, the wealthy are condemned to wealth, to law by men, to ideas, to an endless supply of things. To the wealthy man a thing is no less burdensome than nothing, but he must protect his possessions. He must house them, support, polish and feed them. Why? This is his lot. But the investment banker—Sutherland—is mortal, too, and seeks to preserve life and the laws that give his life meaning, just as David Duff devotes himself to his own brand of justice-after-vengeance,⁴³ because vengeance empowers him and lends his life meaning.

Both the filthy rich man and the filthy poor man, one knighted, the other cursed, are mortal and subject to the laws of nature. Both rally against them—the banker with his possessions that remove him from the troubling visage of mortality, and Duff with his vengeance, which draws him ironically nearer to his mortal fate. One has, the other has not. Both hate each other; each would declare he reigns over the other.

David Duff would smear with horse dough the arc of his past on the banker's BMW 7-Series. Here he is seeking justice by nontraditional means. It is as though he anticipated the car and all it represented. And then comes Sutherland's wife, smeared in hair-dye. Both are messy with the effluvia of their respective stations—marked, as it were. And in between stands the black servant. He is smartly dressed and talks with the *Miss Sutherland* as if he were her equal. But this can't be! How, when Duff is but shit in the lady's eyes, can a black servant be respected, esteemed?

Supremacy is a hallmark of Duff's breed, the white trash. He may be floating in the bottom of the barrel but the barrel sure-as-hell must be sitting on something! So in Duff's view it must be the blacks, represented by Sutherland's servant. David Duff may know he's not a good man, but he can't be the worst. That station remains to be filled by another breed.

Progeny → the rich man wants a legacy. The poor man wants a legacy. The black man wants a legacy. It is not enough to know that he'll die with his coffers full. So the rich man starts a family, the better to perpetuate his wealth. It is not enough to die destitute and

⁴³ "I HAVE A CREED. IT IS CALLED JUSTICE-AFTER-VENGEANCE. I DON'T KNOW WHY I AM UNPOPULAR." —DAVID DUFF

less than zero. So the poor man starts a family, the better to plague the world.

David Duff has his family by the throat—most of it, at least. They are uneducated, underprivileged, emotionally deprived, and transient. They are Duffs. This is true justice: If the rich can perpetuate their kind, so too can trash. The poor man, however, never forgets that his offspring will be condemned to the margins; that they will be born with a rotten wooden spoon in their mouths. But this is the poor man's legacy, and be damned if he isn't proud of it.

No one can argue that David Duff didn't have pride. No one can say that he wasn't a stoic in spirit if not in intellect. He had a principle, if not principles, and that was to defend the honor of his plight. If David Duff had anything to do with it, then his family would defend the honor of their plight too. They may be hired hands but they weren't slaves. They were in the bottom of the barrel, not under it. Duff also had one virtue, and that was to his credit, especially in an age when richer men had many virtues but not the occasions to test them. David Duff had one virtue and that was a single-minded devotion to a simple truth. It doesn't even matter if his simple truth was universal. It only matters that he was bold enough to own it and nurture it: *fire is justice*. And that was that.

If David Duff respected nothing else, he respected fire. A single match could say more than a thousand words—it was the great equalizer.

This tale has a conscience. It isn't only a story of black and white distinctions. Its conscience, personified by Duff's younger son, Brian Todd Jr., forces the inquisitor beyond issues of class and race, into a realm at once introspective and sensitive. The younger son is testament to the humanity of the players. Through his observations we realize that every player, every man, has two selves. There is the self that is subject to judgment, prejudice, law, and the second self that is inviolable, innocent, and unaccountable. The second self is the child in every man, the watcher. The watcher is the ageless conscience, sometimes silenced by its owner's will or experiences, but ever-present still.

Better than the others, or perhaps alone, Brian Todd Jr. penetrates the appearance of his father and sees to the core of his heart, although it is unlikely that he saw much that was surprising. To Duff, his little son is a contradiction to be reckoned with, an

aberration. But his son is aware of his father's anger and the nature of his will to vengeance. David Duff, the young boy knows, may have seemed extraordinary, powerful and fear-inspiring, but that was it. He was just a man, although a man capable of more badness than goodness. An awful thing it is for a father to be betrayed by his own son. But of all Duff's children, his youngest son was most like himself. Duff was a man with a cause, and so was his son, but unlike the father, the son wasn't a madman.

A man may choose madness over reason, especially when reason hasn't significantly contributed to the improvement of his lot. David Duff chose madness because it would better serve his cause, and of course his cause was vengeance. At some point, probably when he knew that the pursuit of reason was fruitless, his conscience was overridden by anger. That anger was so great that it dulled the senses of his offspring—all but one, the younger son, in whom David Duff's conscience was reawakened.

The Duff boys were raised by a wild man. It was only natural that they should follow in his footsteps and be given up totally to wildness, which is a cousin to madness and also that condition's potentiator. In the case of the younger son, Brian Todd Jr., he too was given to wildness, but he was no savage or modern primitive. Brian Todd Jr. was wild but reasonable. Moreover, he was conscientious. If in the end of the tale he was pressed out of society and into nature, it was because of his conscientiousness that set him apart from a world of injustice and frank brutality, of inequality and insensitivity.

Where there are class distinctions there is hate. The oppressed, the underprivileged, are hungry for mediums of self-expression and protestation. When in doubt, the oppressed appropriate. Even before appropriation was a concept, it was done, but then it was more sublime than today. Today, oppressed groups borrow from pop-culture and the media, and adopt consumer goods, perverting or transforming them to their own ends. The goods become symbols of a struggling class or race.

But in Duff's opinion, the distinctions were more clear-cut. Someone had something you didn't, and you resented that something, holding it forever in contempt. Duff represented the impoverished. His face was a Dorothea Lange photograph come alive. But he 'warn't no migrant mother.' He was something else, something extraordinary. He was a Duff, and he had a cause. But

first he must appropriate a symbol of his plighted people, an image to emblazon on a victory flag; one the white trash of America can hoist on their very own personal Iwojima: *FIRE*.

David Duff, however, was no folk hero. He was a bad man, but not an unaccountable man. He was a product of the times, and of a class. He was born into anonymity and so he would die, and no one would understand the meaning of the man with a bullet in his lung, laying dead in the dark, a tire tread-mark on his forehead. We remember folk heroes for a reason. We forget all the other dead for a reason, too. We remember folk heroes because they were memorable; we forget the others because they were not. If the tale has a folk hero, then it is Brian Todd Jr. We remember him because he is burned by his own redeeming actions onto our retinas like a stamp of the Sun. We remember him because we know he will vanish and that his body will never be found in police-blotter again. We know that he is going to walk into the great beyond at daybreak and the birds will be his chorus as the credits roll. In this way, Brian Todd Jr. is immortalized.

Brian Todd Jr. is a hero for other reasons, too. We instantly celebrate him because he has a brain and uses it. We also celebrate him because he has a working heart. He is his mother's son. He does not judge outright. He sees the humanity in all men. He does not fumble in his understanding of human nature. He knows that there are good men and bad men, rich men and poor men, hitters and petters, but they are all men, and were children once, like him, and could be again. Brian Todd Jr. was also farseeing, even if he couldn't describe to himself what he envisaged, for he was too young, and unformed. But we admire him his courage to acknowledge all men, whether or not they acknowledge his father's lot. We know that Brian Todd Jr. understands that men are not only what they do; they are also what they don't seem to be: frightened children, filling in blanks in a crossword puzzle without clues.

× 101702MD

ALLAYNE

There on a beach,
We've not yet visited,
Gulls storming the shoreline,

Waves marching to a silent drumbeat,
An invasion in foam and rolling fury.

There in the wet forest,
Leaves shuddering,
The wind in our bones,
The clouds torn to ribbons and streamers
By the naked branches above.

On foot,
The sound of your familiar feet in my ears,
Our skin baking under an alien sun,
Sailing through tall dry grass,
That grows taller,
Conspires to consume us.

In a painted houseboat,
With a crooked frame
Creaking with the rising tide,
You and I, woven together
By the braids of golden light that
Fall through a porthole.

And in blizzards,
When flurries fill your eyes
And your cheeks bloom in the icy night air.
When warm red paint flows into a
Crackling white world that would blind
If it didn't first brace.

When warm rivers of iron encircle us,
Subsume us,
And we become as lava racing to the sea,
Turned to rock on impact, our hearts fused,
Caste in a cradle of brine,
Forged by tidal armies.

And in a place without knowledge of light;
A place wrought from the iron at the center of stars;
A crypt in which flap

The gentle wings of angels...
 I trace with fingers that have their own gravity
 The outline of your gilded soul.

And when we wake in pale mornings,
 Bedded in warm, heaving earth,
 Framed by bobbing and nodding flowers,
 Sheltered beneath ancient boughs,
 Secure under a porcelain sky...

...I'll say as much and you'll understand,
 That what we feel begins where language ends,
 When into wood-smoke turn the tales I've told
 Of a life we've not yet lived,
 Of a world that would be ours,
 When you and I end...

× **101802MD**

We stay at the Commander Charles Livingston Manor on Nigel Park. There are white curtains and white bed sheets and tiger oak furniture that absorbs daylight; kneads and molds it into anomalous shapes. Allayne stirs, draws the pillow close to her. My heart aches as I watch her—a phantom beneath the thin sheet. I know that my heart is weak. I know that it is reluctant to let go of life. I know that it wants to love this girl. Will it last us this week, this night? A healthy man might mistake the pains in his chest for love-sickness, but I know better. To me they are a warning—a warning that I have chosen to ignore with leonine fierceness. It doesn't bother me that I may die soon. But I don't want Allayne to find me dead; to wake up next to a corpse. I will have to tell her. She is looking at me through her eyelashes. Can she hear me? The ache in my chest with which I woke has vanished. She opens her arms to me and I pull her into my lap, her head resting on my chest. She seems to whisper into my dying heart, *I love you*. I can feel her soft breath; it is light and airy, like butterfly wings.

× **102002MD**

19.5°

Imagine a pair of warhorses
 Dragging a wheel-less chariot,
 Leaving deep ruts, a plume of dust,
 And you will have visualized one facet,
 One poorly wrought facet,
 Of a nail-less clawing over rough rock;
 How un-rarefied air catches in my throat, burns.
 And because it won't do
 To knock some cold preamble from
 Passive rock with blunted tools,
 I'll lead you down,
 Down into the refinery;
 Lead you by the hand to float
 Among the smelters, the blast furnaces,
 To the foundry where I've been
 Building armor these long years;
 To the drawing boards on creosote legs
 Where pencils bitten to the quick vibrate
 With the machinery in the walls;
 Dust filtering through the air—mortar rattled free—
 Sifting through this lowly atmosphere.

I'll show you the plans I've drawn, the cabinets
 Full to overflowing, the stacked boxes...
 I'll say, "Here is the evidence, how it all works,
 Why I work here,
 Why I build armor so that
 I may lay waste to the world above."

Imagine a long-suffering sentry
 From a world to come, in rags,
 A heavy holster at his hip,
 Squinting into the horizon,
 Waiting for the alarm of hoof beats,
 The ratchet and clang of steel treads
 Grinding the earth into fine gravel.

Watch him endure the heft of the armor,
 Seared by the sun, baked into his skin,
 Already pocked by bullets, by rocks, by flying bone.
 We'll sit at his feet while he's on his watch,
 Observe the eddies of rusty dirt
 Aggregate around his boots.

Imagine the tales the sentry could tell
 If he could speak,
 If he weren't bred mute;
 If he could still answer the call of sleep;
 If he could coil up under a rock,
 And corkscrew into the earth
 For a day or three.
 But as in the refinery, so too in the desert on a sentry's watch:
Armor by subjects for subjects; armor for its own sake.

I have but riddles,
 Sentences melted and disfigured in cauldrons,
 Tempered, hammered into warped horseshoes
 Worn by warhorses
 That will charge my own sentries,
 Stampede them in cyclonic fury.
 And it does not get better than this,
 Simpler, safer than warming the drawing board,
 Bearing down into yellowing paper
 With stubs of graphite,
 Designing new and better armor.

And now into the smoky den
 Where the engravers bicker,
 Scratch their bearded faces,
 Unfurl sheet-metal over dark anvils,
 Hammer glyphs, ornamental flourishes, stamps:
 Listen to them hiss as they work,
 Forked tongues running over their sharp teeth,
 The syncopation of their too-long nails.
 These are my craven charges, zamak artisans,
 Interpreters of riddles—my riddles;
 They are not of this Earth.

We breathe the same superheated air,
 But as in the desert, so too in the refinery:
Riddles by subjects for subjects; Riddles for riddle's sake.

I retreat at the speed of sound;
 Leave the sentries, the artisans, the smelters,
 Scramble up the dark wells into the brown fields,
 Run through dead husks under dying light
 To the cliffs;
 Watch wildness dashed on the rocks below,
 Turned to foam,
 Into something reproducible, with dimension—
 Objects, however fleeting, without armor:
 The ocean's sock-puppets...

× **102102MD**

"I was healthy until I decided I needed to get better."

—Esteban Suárez

ESTEBAN DICTATES

Esteban is bed-ridden. Valeria has found an old Graflex 16mm projector. We project old movies on the wall, lie in bed beside him. Valeria changes his drip. His body is ravaged. Last night we watched "L'avventura" ...*again*. Esteban is obsessed with the Monica Vitti character, Claudia. Valeria has unearthed decades of criticism of the movie, dropped cardboard box-loads of newspaper clippings, magazines and scholarly journals on Esteban's bed. Esteban has discovered Bosley Crowther (regrettably) and Patrick Nowell-Smith (fortuitously). He says he's found a kindred spirit in the latter and it is imperative he write a letter to Nowell-Smith at once! He dictates:

Dear Mr. Nowell-Smith,

I am writing regarding your criticism of "L'avventura." I was stunned by the intentness and focus of the movie's visual images, and by the masterful affectation of the characters and the landscape. It would appear, in this

respect, that Antonioni has an uncanny grasp of the objectified landscape. His handling of its components is velvet-pawed; it is one in which language is employed both as a musical instrument and a precision tool. Herein, I wish to address the treatment of his characters, the landscape, and the interaction between the two, respectively.

Firstly, I would like to address the character, Anna. Her role is at once nominal and all-important. This small distinction motivates the film and constructs a loose context, a web across which the other characters can stretch their legs. I was taken in by Anna's indifference to things Earthly; by the underplayed religiosity of her nature; beyond the cold and unfeeling pretenses belied by her sexlessness with the character, Sandro. I saw a young woman disillusioned by the frivolities of her era; a woman struggling to aspire to a higher order, a greater good apart from the flesh with which her companions are preoccupied.

At first, Anna makes concessions to Sandro's human weaknesses and like Magdalene, offers him her body in order to quell his suffering. Then she makes the ultimate sacrifice—dies or disappears, if only symbolically, that Sandro's inequities might be forgiven through her magnanimous self-effacement. In so many words, Anna tells Sandro that she doesn't want to lose him, but she no longer feels him. In other words, Anna is renouncing the flesh, which, although has served her well, has run its course and attained its ultimate end. In this way, Anna is the story's unsung hero—her function is fulfilled. Anna disappears and her companions are forced to become acquainted with the limitless, and so too are we, the audience.

On the other hand, Sandro is suffering the pangs of the flesh with which he still identifies, and of unrequited love. For Sandro, there are no simple answers. Only through vice can Sandro hold onto life, which has long ceased to speak to him and answers only with an insolent stare. In this respect, Sandro is not alone. The others of his troupe too are afflicted by this unsettling paradigm of isolation and despair. Patrizia so well illustrated the predicament of her contemporaries when she expressed her concern over the islands. "...so many islands—so much water around them." How like their lives! Antonioni's characters are islands unto themselves. The storm on the evening of Anna's disappearance says it all. The weather was changing; the ideologies of the times, like the clouds, were darkening noticeably—becoming increasingly self-centered and hopeless. In your monograph, you said something to this effect. You said that the characters

"...learn to live alone with the margin of freedom that is inescapably theirs and theirs alone."

Then comes hope in the person of Claudia. Claudia, the observer, is hope's saving grace. She bonds with Sandro and in so doing creates the bridge which mends the chasm between despair and hope. Claudia is of particular interest to me. For one, she is an innocent. She is almost a child, and in this way, she contrasts boldly with her environment. This aspect is exemplified in the balcony shot in Noto of which there is a frame still printed on page 39 in your monograph.

Claudia too, like Anna before her, makes concessions to the weaknesses of her fellows, but she does not abandon them. Rather, she grants them their inequities with compassion, for she realizes that their weaknesses, as well as her own, are exhibits and artifacts of the constraints placed upon them by their environment. This is a hallmark of the human condition of which we as viewers become keenly aware through the person of Claudia.

This, then, brings us to the most prevalent aspect of "L'avventura:" the landscape. Like the vase on the island over the age of which the travelers-in-arms were debating, the past, with the disappearance of Anna, is broken and in pieces between the interstices of time. What is left is uncertainty, a feeling evinced by the closeness of the landscape. Here, Antonioni's handiwork becomes apparent.

Angular, architectonic and alienating, the landscape forces itself on the characters, the story, and the audience. The landscape, both in the city and in the rural country, is portrayed like a monument—changeless, imposing and indifferent; the landscape, on which men both impose their notions of God and graft their hopes, remains the fact from which all mysteries come and all mysteries go. It is the landscape into which all of our circular arguments disappear, and the peg on which men hang their miseries. Moreover, it is watchful. It is this last contention through which Michelangelo Antonioni's skilled hand becomes of essential importance in his expression.

The camera lingers, inviting the landscape—stark in its beauty and noiselessness. The melancholy closes in on us. What is left: *Solitude*; Antonioni has cast a spell with ambiguity and suggestion. Did the landscape whisper just then? No. It was that baffling, immovable objectivity of his which shook us for a second. Why does this frighten us? Antonioni has shown us what it means to "...live alone with the margin of freedom that is inescapably..." ours and ours alone.

My gratitude toward your criticism is immense. It read like an instruction manual. I am struck by you as an artist and I am struck by your perceptivity. Great men evolve not by reflex alone, nor do they become over-conscious of their insights. Instead, through discoveries, they evolve progressively, and the mysteries of Heaven and Earth which impress themselves and enter into their works abruptly, like flashes, and they are aware that they have come, not at the moment of their appearance, but in the praises they receive.

Affectionately,

Esteban Suárez

× **102202MD**

ESTEBAN SUÁREZ, JULY 2, 1973 - OCTOBER 22, 2002

THE DEAD, TOO, WERE CHILDREN ONCE...

Young Esteban woke at 7:00 ^{AM}, dressed hurriedly and scaled the banister to the hall that led into the kitchen. He poured himself a sloppy bowl of cereal and sat in front of the TV. He shoved spoonfuls of cereal into his mouth and flipped through the channels looking for a good cartoon. The channels were fuzzy; he could see the distorted face of a television anchor through the static. Esteban turned off the television and walked to a bay window encrusted with ice. In the sky were streaks of orange and pink; in the wan light, mounds of snow covered the once-green lawn. The hedges resembled colossal dollops of whipped cream.

His father, Adolfo, will be up soon; he will dress, put on his boots and walk Esteban to the big car. When he isn't looking, while he's scraping ice from the windshield, Esteban will throw a snowball at him—he visualizes the snowball exploding, leaving a mark on his father's jacket. And if he is lucky, his father might make a snowball of his own; Esteban will hide behind the hedge.

× 102302MD

"If it isn't bloody, it probably isn't a very good revolution."

—James Trainer

A TRIBUTE TO AMBASSADOR JAMES TRAINER ON THE 4TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CONCEPTION OF THE ORCHARD PARK REVOLT OF 1998

James Trainer's position is an interesting and compelling one. It is also unpopular. Nevertheless, there is much in the content of what he says that should be considered carefully. James Trainer's interest is in facts. What is a fact? A fact can be equated with an incontrovertible truth; something that has been determined to be so; that has been defended by the human mind with evidence sought by the same mind: *Fact*.

There is nothing banal about facts. The perception of facts makes our world a habitable place. Facts enable each and every one of us to negotiate the world in which we live. Facts, facilitated by language, enable us to describe and study the world as it is. Facts inherit nothing from presumption. Their genes are inherited from those minds that determined that to live justly is to exercise fully the intellect that was their inheritance, and with which quality could be introduced into life on earth, not subsistence. Animals subsist. Human beings, with reason at their disposal, no longer subsist. They do not graze. They do not forage. They do not herd. And by the grace of reason only a small fraction still serve as shepherds and fishers of men.

Faith does not now, nor has it historically, achieved the aim that it promised to deliver: *peace*. It repeatedly and effectively proscribes reason from our everyday discourse. James Trainer is one of a small chorus of new voices in this country that is growing intolerant; intolerant of the license that has been bestowed upon faith; intolerant of the moderation with which the world's faiths are regarded; intolerant of the ability of faith to eviscerate reason from the mind of man. James Trainer represents a new type of evangelist: An evangelist for reason. His concern is the ability of religious moderation to short-circuit debates that must be had if indeed our interest is in the longevity of the species on planet earth. Do not

assume that James Trainer doesn't care. He does. In fact, he is clearly impassioned and by defending reason and its utilities—logic and rationality—he is revealing a sincere interest in the fate of his race.

James Trainer's dissatisfaction is palpable to everyone that reads his treatises. He is bringing many novel ideas to the table, or novel in so far as the ideas are falling victim to historical relativism. So, in a manner of speaking, he is resurrecting old ideas that are the children of one of the greatest legacies of humankind: reason. And in order to properly champion reason in the 21st century, a new and unpopular type of debate must be forced on the public. Here, James Trainer's philosophy may be facilitated. Here, where faith has been consciously rejected, he may attempt to describe the underpinnings of a new type of discourse that must be adopted if conflicts of a global nature are to be suspended. James Trainer speaks to that element in each man that flickers with the light of consciousness; that revels in the liberty that is each man's inheritance by virtue of his ability to think. James Trainer is fully aware that his life is finite. And for this reason, he would ask that mankind adopt that modicum of reason that would ensure quality of life for all men on earth, and while they are alive!

Faith has been shown conclusively to serve as a delimiter to the acquisition of knowledge, era after era. And it achieves this end by starving each child, each man, of the wonder that comes naturally to him at birth; the awe that visits each child upon perceiving the world, as it is, with only language at his disposal, not preconceived notions; language, not dogma. The language with which he can achieve a record of what he sees and touches and smells. A record that will serve as a testimony to his interest in life and his deep respect for the right of others to live theirs to the fullest, but not in a conditional way, not by the grace of Odin, not for the sake of Baldr. This child's interest is in the good. He understands fully the value of life on earth and consequently, he understands the value of the lives of others. From childhood, he has been encouraged to exercise his powers of reason. He does not see Baldrists, or Jews or Muslims or Hindus. He sees only people possessed of a curiosity to further the capabilities of a species that possesses consciousness. His life is finite and he realizes this. But his sights are not trained on an afterlife. Rather, his sights are trained on what he is able to produce of value for his successors, for they will inherit the Earth:

the producers, the intellectuals, the visionaries, the industrialists, NOT the meek. For the meek will have produced nothing of lasting substance, as their interest has not been in this earthly life, it has been in the next life. And consequently, they die equals to their aspirations: starving, empty, and hopeful.

The rational do not believe that some things cannot be answered. The reasonable do not acknowledge that there is an ineffable or an unknowable anything. The reasonable concede that man is limited by his knowledge in the present, but that his successors, given that they were descended from caretakers of reason, will have the tools at their disposal to answer the questions about which their ancestors were forced to wonder. To live not for an afterlife but for the sake of your great, great, great grandchildren is to live a moral life, by standards that seek nothing less than the truth—a truth that must be worked for, not bought on the cheap on Sunday morning.

× **110102MD**

STACK OF HOURS

With the moon down and the stars dying,
 How do I do it, show you...
 How a man can break his ribs with his own heart?
 It can't be done:
 The description, any description,
 Of the sound that prescience makes:

A thousand crying gulls in an aluminum pipe;
 Of the feeling of time gliding on rusty hooks.
 How?
 This vicious, unforgiving knowing,
 With tooth and bone ready to explode
 In the cold vacuum of awareness;
 And to bear it,
 The stack of hours mortared with helpless minutes.
 To feel chilled ink in your spine,
 Iron in your hips, gunmetal in your wrists,
 And a dead echoing foundry behind your eyes.

Night *does* fall.

It is a child with skinned knees in the street.
 Night, that rarefied cave in which the future stands Naked—

Your world as it will be:
 Crouching in a sea of goldenrods and bluegrass,
 Rockets masquerading as second suns,
 An old picture in your pocket,
 Too aware of the holes in your pants
 And the ringing in your ears.
 The future—*knowing*,
 And being able to see you clearly from here,
 Now, at this hour,
 In the stead of dreaming;
 Holding little funerals for each passing breath,
 Awake and buried in familiar pillows,
 Under an avalanche of memories,
 Sleeping cities sliding into the sea.

And I could tell you where I will go from here
 And under what sky
 The great and future roofs will rise,
 And toward what stars the soul's spires will point,
 The song the spirit's belfry will sing...

I could: Tell you,
 But I'm watching you as you try to sleep,
 Some wonderful olive in a wooden press,
 And I choose to burn words as kindling instead.

And I could tell you about desperate prayers
 In the chapel of the tidewater night;

I could: Tell you,
 But night will expire and we'll soon stand again
 In the cold unyielding light of morning.
 It will demand an account of us
 As it always does,
 And we'll check our pockets for receipts,
 Proof of sleep, the costs of dreaming.

And I know what these broken ribs will look like
 In the x-ray of daybreak;
 I know the whispering beaches will grow loud again.
 The roofs will bake and the roads will melt.

This is the burden of prescience;
 This is the future in the present tense;
 This is being at the mercy of the whims of nature.
 If only memory were a painted desert,
 Eroded by sand and wind;
 If only.

× **110202MD**

“If there was an opposition, I didn’t notice,”

—George Irwin

FASCISMO

That opposition is of inestimable importance at this historic juncture which represents the question of the survivability of the affable intellect and the pervasion of Duffian idealism is unquestionable. That we are clearly submitting to the perverse notion that the husbandry of civil liberties by a sovereign is preferable to autonomy and self-actualization is a glimpse into the abyss that is our probable destiny. It may be argued that the apex of the Intellect has been reached; that it may be described in annalistic terms: “the short annals of the Intellect.” But I would argue that this is not so; that the fundamentals of the Intellect, the bases that are described kinetically by the notions of autonomy and self-actualization, remain sound; that the Intellect, evinced repeatedly throughout its “short annals” is alive and well; that it cannot be likened to short-lived filaments exploding in a vacuum.

We are at a crossroads—a juncture described by the secession of the Intellect to baser pursuits, or a reinvigoration by autonomy and self-actualization. We are as lenses grown fallible by the grease of time and by abuse, but not beyond repair; not beyond the polish that may be restored to such ideals by grace of introspection.

That opposition is not impossible has been shown irrefutably throughout history. That the Intellect has grown starved of history does complicate this proof, but this is not a proof with dots that cannot be connected, given due diligence and determination, both hallmarks of the Intellect. But no such proof may be solved in the realm of partisan politics, the machinations of which have seemingly outwitted a goodly portion of its various constituencies, deftly rewriting our annalistic understanding of the precepts of a Republic, replacing ideals which were once largely perceived as inalienable with stentorian Plutocracy. That we do not perceive this inordinate reorganization of the rights which we once regarded as dear, is at once frightening and telling. And herein lays the crux. That the Intellect may already have begun what could be perceived as a multi-generational departure from the purely autonomous to the servile is not improbable, given the passivity by which it appears to be informed in spite of a host of environmental incentives that might have in other epochs served as adequate stimuli, or fodder for opposition.

That opposition seems at insurmountable odds with powers that have been wielded in such a way as to suggest invincibility is arguable, in so far as we would impose conventionalism on opposition; in so far as we would wish opposition to assume familiar forms. But no longer can we determine the shape of opposition by what is familiar, by what describes the shape of a common proof. Opposition must assume a greater flexibility with the aim of achieving a mutability that may transcend borders and cultures; a mutability that lends itself to native oppositional movements while retaining the fundamental intent that was its original impetus: the preservation of autonomy and self-actualization, the fundamentals of Intellect. Lest we cede these privileges to Duffian idealism, a meaningful opposition must be implemented with perhaps a dangerous haste, as we are indeed at a crossroads, historic in its scope, but not, it is my sincere hope, possessing the momentum that was envisioned by the Futurists; a momentum that would supersede any and all attempts to thwart its questionable aims. If this is the case, perhaps opposition has been lost, relegated to the short annals of the Intellect, in which case, the dystopia about which we have been warned may be upon us.

× **110302MD**

“At the very least, we should hope for a riot. I should think that, absent a new revolt, Orchard Park will not grow.”

—Ambassador James Trainer

LOOSE RESORTERAS

One prominent possibility is a collapsing Orchard Park. If that coup-prone region were to dissolve into civil war, possibly between two or more factions of the East End militia, urgent questions would be raised concerning the whereabouts and security of the neighborhood’s slingshot arsenal. Given the prevalence of anarchist-fundamentalist groups in that potentially explosive area, military planners worry that some of the area’s slingshots could fall into the hands of Russell Huggins or a similar figure (i.e., Ambassador James Trainer). Such a scenario would present an even more pressing threat to core Baltimorean security than a Quebecois attack on Maine or a Mexican invasion of Texas. It is highly doubtful that the United States could stand aside. More likely, it would intervene militarily to help the moderate faction (if a moderate faction exists) in the case of civil unrest in order to restore and reestablish the security of the area’s arsenal of slingshots.

Other military operations are possible, too. A deployment to Orchard Parks might result, for example, if Brooklyn and Orchard Park again went to war and found themselves on the brink of using slingshots. Under such circumstances, a large multilateral force might, for example, deploy to Catonsville to run the region for an extended period prior to convening a political process to resolve the region’s long-term future.

Admiral Hadley N. Leash voiced the concern of many military officers that Orchard Park was a conundrum of the worst sort, an ethno-political conflict manifested in warring factions not unlike the clans and sub-clans of Somalia. As the 19th century French military theorist Antoine Henri de Jomini lamented, wars originating in civil or ideological conflict are the “most deplorable for they enlist the worst passions and become vindictive, cruel and terrible.” He warned, “No army, however disciplined, can contend successfully

against such resistance unless it is strong enough to hold all the essential points of the region, cover its communications and at the same time furnish an active force sufficient to beat the enemy wherever he may present himself.”

× **110402MD**

HINTERLANDS⁴⁴

Solid things attract fissures,
 Concrete is wanting of cracks.
 I felt the sum of so many breaches,
 Of fractures by stress,
 As if wind and rain had
 No uncertain effect upon me.
 But then, I was still a tightly coiled thing:
 I held in my hands the flanges of an angel,
 And was sensitive to her features.
 I believed.
 And then I felt my grip loosen,
 My resolve...
 Peeling like leaves of paint or twists of bark.
 Something in me was rented.
 A fault appeared, widened,
 And soon became impassable.
 There were omens, too—fitting omens.
 Creeping through a hedgerow in August,
 We beheld a **blackbird**, gasping, unwell.
 It alighted upon my arm,
 And there took its last breath.
 There was an unearthly quiet.
 The fault grew wider still,
 Yawned...
 And there were prior transgressions—
 Not even a child is blameless.
 Memory raises them in stature,
 Lending them an inch here and an inch there
 Until in his adulthood,

⁴⁴ HINTERLANDS, 2003, STAG RECORDS (STAG.TOMFAHY.ORG)

They loom disproportionately large.
 But this is largely the fault of memory—
 The currency of conscience.
 Strong and weak alike will exile
 These transgressions come-alive-lately,
 And they become as trees, scarp, abutments, and slag,
 Forgivable for their lending his world
 A certain ignominious tangibility.
 He will need that,
 Because there are worse things than these;
 There are wrongs—committed, contrived,
 Dealt out like cards, or blows, or bee-stings,
 And remembered like so much reconnaissance—
 In and out—
 I might have seen it coming...
 On the banks of Oriskane Falls,
 Or at the opening of the home-school;
 I might have felt something
 Slithering under the surface—
 Something with a forked tongue;
 But love would benumb that sense of the impending
 And would stroll enwrapped in moth-eaten surety;
 I might have heard a whisper long ago
 In the backseat of a Pontiac—
 There, holding one hand each
 Of a girl-child and a baby—
 But I didn't interpret the whisper as a warning;
 Rather, a tuneless thing...
 Now, I remember it as a dirge:
 Crickets with broken wings
 Soaked in the sigh of a fleet night.
 But sinless I was on the banks of Oriskane Falls,
 With a balsa-wood heart,
 With hope.
 But it escapes us all, sooner or later,
 Meaning does,
 Leaving us somewhat bereft, clueless,
 Hopelessly dispassionate,
 With a fig in our throats.
 The blame is our own, we realize,

And Sunday services are no antidote
 To the pain that is the price of our sickness.
 We look backward, as we must,
 Looking for root causes;
 Because we can't separate, as they say,
 The wheat from the chafe.
 We have grown somewhat smaller, soluble, not liked,
 On a spit of our own contrivance;
 And that no one will share in our memories,
 Is probably just,
 Considering the crimes we've committed;
 They are many.
 But this isn't the place for lists, exegesis, Orders...
 This is a lament, plea...
 An attempt to strike a bargain
 With the forces that be;
 A wistful attempt, we on our knees,
 At winning the favor of our judges.
 They are ours, these crimes; we own them.
 Were we able, we'd take them to market,
 Or sell shares;
 But it is understood that in us are ingrown hooks.
 And on the shores of consciousness,
 Where the whales toil,
 On rocks as severe, sit our judges,
 Stolid, cavernous, inviolable, with memories as
 Indelible as our own, perhaps more so...
 And we have but memories
 With which to make our case,
 While the judges...*the judges*...they have eternity.

× **110502MD**

"The very act of eating eggs is soothing and assuages general feelings of disorientation that are likely to be exacerbated by the specter of death."

—Russell Huggins

I woke up in the lobby of the Commander Charles Livingston Manor on Nigel Park. I was disoriented. I wasn't injured: should I

have been? I felt my arms and legs, groin and head. I wiggled my toes. I went outdoors. Birds were chirping. The sky was crisscrossed with branches heavy with leaves. The air was warm, almost muggy, scented with plums, and piqued with the aroma of sawdust, or pine bark.

I had floaters in my eyes—one in the right and two in the left; one shaped like a corkscrew, the other like a baton. I blinked. They wouldn't go away.

These weren't my clothes—a suit: blue blazer with white slacks, brown shoes. In the lapel of the blazer was a wilted yellow flower. I crossed the street, passed through Nigel Square, entered the Nigel Park Diner, sat heavily on a stool, ordered eggs, and tried to forget this incident.

× 110602MD

“A new chapter is the place where an author’s constipation ends and his debauch resumes.”

—George Irwin

RADICALISM, FASCISMO AND ANARCHY: THE ORCHARD PARK SCHOOL

Outside of Baltimore, the Orchard Park tradition of writing is unquestionably the most diverse. Unlike the Baltimorean, the Orchard Park approach is not primarily a religious, philosophical, or scientific one, excluding the influence of Anarchism beginning during the Cecilius dynasty, and which reached a pinnacle during the Huggins (1913-1995). The roots of the Orchard Park approach to writing are recessed in the early orientations of the culture, and those orientations, as they do in all cultures, determine the character of its art.

The orientation of the Orchard Parkians, however, differed dramatically from the Baltimoreans whose writing was dominated by reason and corporeal beauty, or from the Washingtonians, whose writing was determined by religious symbolism. Again, the Orchard Park approach was not primarily religious in nature, nor was it handmaid to philosophy or science. The approach was primarily poetic and imaginative. The Orchard Park style of writing,

save for occasional lapses, avoided the pitfalls of the academic style. Absent also was the ego, which found its home in surrealism, expressionism and romanticism.

What informed Orchard Park writing? Two chief doctrines: Fascismo and Anarchism, both doctrines of living indigenous to Orchard Park, and that emphasized in their turn “inner reality,” by which is meant a mediate between opposing forces, such as matter-spirit, divine-human. In other words, where the Baltimorean mind is seen as typically dualistic, a purveyor of extremes, the authors of Orchard Park sought to fuse antagonistic forces, creating an overall dynamic union of opposites; a union required by a work for overall completeness.

In Baltimore, the conception of the spirit is irredeemably infused with religious meaning. It belongs to the prayerful life and the worshipful. In Orchard Park, however, where religion of a Baltimorean type was not evolved, the conception of the spirit was not two with matter, as in Baltimorean arts and letters, but one with matter. Where in Baltimore, philosophy, science, and religion are the primary vehicles for self-expression, writing assumed that function in Orchard Park and became the medium of choice for the expression of the profound.

Fascismo is the cornerstone of the Orchard Park approach to writing. The subject matter, interpretations, and the imaginations that determined both were influenced by the concept of Fascismo. Through his writings, the author sought communion with matter—rocks, trees, water—as well as communicated with his pens the soul inherent in that matter. In the words of George Irwin, “Not I *or* thou. Without the rock, a slingshot is but a doorstep.”

Orchard Park authors were from the outset given to expanding the vocabulary of the context in which they developed as authors. Yet they also were disposed to assimilating into their artistic schema hand-me-downs from their predecessors, some esteemed and some not. Still, regardless of the styles with which they experimented, hybrids between those of their forbears and their own styles, the end product served as a revelation of the author. The Orchard Park approach was distinctly Anarchistic in its orientation but it did not sacrifice writing as a process of self-individuation for the sake of self-effacement. It is agreed that the human being is not the dominant theme in Orchard Park writing, but even as the author’s presence was not conspicuous, it was also not completely absent.

The concept of Fascismo may have blurred the distinction between the life of revolution and the experience of man, but it did not render the author obsolete. This idea is reflected in the works of the Huggins dynasty, in which human figures are the subject. If the early idealistic writings are not expressly Fascismoistic in nature, that is because they are of a spiritual order. Huggins dynasty writing was secular, and represented the rationalistic, human-centered facets of Orchard Park culture. During the Huggins dynasty, we see repeatedly images designed as homage to important personages. According to George Irwin, anarchism had become dominant in state and society, and its influence extended to writing: "Pictures of grotesque subjects," says Irwin, "performed a cathartic function in society, degrading the spirit and elevating the minds of men."

It was during the Suárez Dynastic period that an explicit Fascismo aesthetic emerged, replacing the predominant anarchistic ideal without abandoning it altogether. Fascismo aesthetic was reflected principally in radical writing, as there was a notable shift from an interest in man, typified by the early idealistic writings of the Huggins Dynasty, to revolution-centered works. In these so-called revolution-centered works, authors gained a certain mastery over the pen, their works no longer but informal sketches exploiting rudimentary techniques. Moreover, technique aside, radical writing became the essence of the Orchard Park tradition, directing and inspiring the Orchard Park approach to writing. Radical political themes no longer served simply as fitting backdrops to secular documents, as in the Huggins Period, but were soon depicted for their own sake. In a word, through radical writing, revolution became a convention. Through depictions of revolution, an aesthetic was developed that did not exclude the subject, but could operate independently of that subject. More specifically, the said aesthetic was guided by the performance of the act of writing, given that the act was conducted in the "right spirit." According to Irwin, "right spirit" connotes an activity that is executed in such a way that "the author is entirely absorbed in the activity, so that it is accomplished, as it were, of its own accord, allowing man to enter into concord with the creative forces of revolution."

This is not to suggest that radical writing, whether it is of the literati order from the 19th century Cecilius Dynasty or a monumental radical image from the early Huggins Dynasty, is achieved in a trance. On the contrary, the radical writing is a valid

aid on the path leading to self-realization. Indeed the author is absorbed entirely in his work, but where the Baltimorean author is at the mercy of his vision, divorced as it were from the creative process, the Anarchistic author remains at the helm of his imagination, guiding it toward an intended end.

If the Anarchistic author wasn't at the mercy of his vision, than by the same token he was partial to the forces of revolution. Nature, to the Anarchistic author, was not an opponent, but an ally. It worked not through or against him, but with him. He did not strive to coerce or conquer nature. The laws that determined nature also determined him, the author. In effect, the Anarchistic author conveyed the mystery that permeated the natural. Even so, the author was not forced to rely on extreme methods, as in many Baltimorean works. Again, the Anarchistic author was not two with matter, and his experience of inner reality was direct. Then, it goes without saying that his understanding of the relationships between spirit and matter, also informed his conception of Heaven and Earth.

The Orchard Park conception of Heaven and Earth was not unusual in a strictly Baltimorean sense. As Fascismo informed all things, it followed that it was present equally in the Heavens and on Earth. Orchard Park writing reflects this notion. In Irwin's words, "The Orchard Park approach avoided every literary convention which might direct the imagination away from *otherworldiness*." In the whole of the surviving Orchard Park oeuvre there is little that would persuade one to suggest that it was uncommon to depict the ugly. Surely there are flattering images of figures, but few that would cast the natural world or its occupants in a *purely* positive light. Considering the notion of Fascismo, and its manifestation in all things, this presence of the ugly and the deformed is not unusual. In fact, it is a central tenet in the Orchard Park approach to the art of writing.

The character of Orchard Park writing is supremely non-religious. Firstly, Fascismo was impersonal. Individual authors did not consider having an audience with the divine. So, they were not disposed to expressing themselves through religion, but through art. Anarchism, like Fascismo, was not a true religion. Rather, it focused on one man's relationship to another, making it expressly humanistic in nature. Where Fascismo imparted a sense of mystery

to the universe, and thus to the character of writing, Anarchism contributed to Orchard Park and to their writing a moral stimulus.

The fusion of opposing virtues has given the Orchard Park author balance and strength. Greatness was assured when the stability of Anarchic lucidity was added to the imagination of Fascismo freedom, naturalness and mystery.

In Baltimore, Baldrism imparted to the individual a special value. In Orchard Park, this sense of the special was absent. More important than the development of the special individual, was oneness with the revolutionary spirit. The individual was not hedged against revolution but was a working component within it. Of course, this pervasive notion informed the Orchard Park style of writing.

The Orchard Park approach to writing was a mediate between extremes. Such examples as human/divine, man/revolution, already have been called upon. This mediation between forces that would otherwise diametrically oppose one another aided Anarchistic authors in their approach to the execution of the desired subject matter, which included the human figure, animals, birds and plants. Neither the role of tradition and its influence upon style must be spared in this discussion nor the direct influence it bestowed on the conception of originality in Orchard Park writings.

Tradition in the context of Orchard Park writing cannot be understood in the same way that tradition in Baltimore is understood. At once we see consistent distinctions between the developments of technique in Baltimore and in Orchard Park. Regarding the tradition of style in Orchard Park writings, George Irwin emphasizes the deterministic role of the 'word.' "The word refers to an individual stab-wound made by the pen, where the will of the pen determines the objective of the word," he says. To the word, Irwin adds the elements: imagination, wonderment, and enchantment. All of these elements, when conjoined, and when in active dialogue with Fascismo, contribute to the overall effectiveness of the composition. In Irwin's words, "Composition proceeds from the arrangement of these elements into meaningfully charged words."

Nevertheless, what made a writing Orchard Parkian was not merely the coordination of disparate elements. Unquestionably, the said elements were necessary, but not all-important. It was not by the means alone that the Orchard Parkians were motivated to write,

which is not to suggest that aesthetics, unity, balance or the mastery of ideology were the driving forces. The true motivation of the Orchard Parkian to pursue writing is described by none of these. The Orchard Parkian would sooner resort to terms liberated from poetry and mysticism to express their inward motivations, as the path of the author was not an expressly technical one, but lyrical. Thus, the Orchard Park tradition of writing can be viewed as one that relies upon the subtle and the elusive, as well as on the poetic similes conveyed by Fascismo.

*The Ways of earth are conditioned by those of Anarchism,
The Ways of men are conditioned by those of Fascismo,
And the Ways of heaven are conditioned by those of Radicalism.*

—**Fascismo Handbook, XXX.**

It followed from the notions outlined in the Fascismo Handbook, that concerning writing, radicalism of method and technique was of the essence. A successful author's approach was effortless and reflected his union with Fascismo. Yet the approach wasn't careless. The Orchard Park author first insured his preparedness. According to Irwin, "Every age insisted upon the necessity of agitation in order to reach the highest state of creative preparedness." Only then, perfectly attuned to the melody of Fascismo, present in all things, was the Orchard Park author prepared to achieve communion with and capture the state of revolution. Irwin reiterates the supreme goal of the author when he says, "In writings, as in real radicalism, grotesque and occult forms were an embodiment of radical principles and a source of mystical delight." That is, the image was executed skillfully with attention paid in equal parts to form and "interior reality."

The inclinations of the Orchard Parkians did not sway toward such Baltimorean preoccupations as reason, science, and overt expressionism. If the Orchard Park approach to the art of writing is distinct from the Baltimorean approach that is the direct result of a pointed impartiality to form. The Orchard Park approach emphasized the intangible where the Baltimorean evaluated a work on the basis of intelligibility. This is not to say that the Orchard Parkian disregard form, per se. Rather, the major allusion in Orchard Park works was to the evidence of Fascismo in those

forms. The empty spaces, or voids, as they are sometimes called, were not accidents in the Orchard Park tradition. Empty spaces were direct allusions to the ineffable, the forms within the forms. Hence the importance of the carriage return and the economy with which it is employed.

The Orchard Park approach to the art of writing, then, is primarily mystical, with a view to creating meaningful works, executed deliberately, with a will to that meaning, codified as it were by a tradition steeped in an existential actuality. The Orchard Park approach by its very nature, is compelled from the outset to supply the author with a viable mode of expression that at once presents an existential reality, or actuality, as in a mountain and a void, and simultaneously a presentiment and fulfillment of an author's will to meaning.

If this singular approach fails to achieve a simple equilibrium among the many elements in any given work, and rather breeds tension among the same elements, than the approach is working. According to Irwin, "Tension compels. Tension is an indispensable prerequisite in Orchard Park writing. There is nothing in the world of art that so effectively catalyzes a work's overall meaning as tension. That note will play that was struck from a taut string, so too in writing."

The writing that is the child of the Orchard Park approach is 'no-vacuum.' Orchard Park writing is 'no-void.' It is never inherently empty, in spite of the empty spaces. For the tension that is imposed on a work after the Orchard Park approach forbids that event and instead promulgates meaning. Tension activates the notion of Fascismo that presupposes the interplay of unlike forces. Tension, then, cleansed by Anarchism, and checked in the spiritual sense by the precepts of Fascismo, enables the various forces aligned under the Orchard Park approach to co-mingle in harmony. In effect, there are produced works of art that endure in spite of the tumult of time, the injustices of memory, and the spin of history.

× 110702MD

KATHARINE'S REALPOLITIK

Katharine woke late, really late,
With more crud in her eyes than usual.

David's half of the bed was empty and damp;
 He sweated something awful at night.
 The cat was at the foot of the bed,
 On its back, between her legs;
 He looked haggard this morning:
 Pieces of bone poked out of his skin.
 Rolling over, like tinder,
 Like a scroll of sticks and burlap and twine,
 She ordered her pale arm into the half-light;
 Ordered it to troll the scarp
 That was mattress and twisted sheets and underwear
 To the hummock of dead-skin
 Scented pants on the floor,
 To cooling pockets and loose aspirin.
 And this was purpose, Katharine thought to herself,
 This morning floundering with thin arms,
 With burning eye-sockets,
 With legs that were no legs any longer;
 Without David mostly, the perennial early-riser,
 Combed and shaven David,
 Pants-on, purposeful, hand-in-glove,
 Set-of-keys David.
 Was she still David's Katharine,
 With ochre Indian salve skin,
 Black eyes and waxwing eyelids—
 This tired bee, this windowsill bee
 With nothing wings and pebble eyes?
 "Today is your day,"
 David whispered sometime after midnight,
 Leaning into her like a barn owl,
 Scratchy feathers digging into her ribs,
 Beak in her ear: "*Today is your day.*"
 She feigned sleep,
 An unsteady, undulating buoy in a black harbor sleep;
 Waited for David to go out with the tide.
Today is your day, Katharine thought to herself.
 This is your frozen fun day;
 Your fabric-softened day.
 She rubbed what was left of her thighs
 Together like a cricket,

Listened to the eructation of passing trucks,
Vectored the sun from the window to the bed
And back again,
Counted the rustlings of the thrushes
In the Thorne apples.
Her head pressed into the mattress,
The crepe paper sheet burning her face,
She listened to the thrum of sparrows
That nested in the box-spring.
Soon, polo-playing David would be home
In his wooden shoes
And black pants and pink tie,
Smelling of hand-shakes and carpet fibers;
Soon, to spy from the threshold on his whicker girl
With nothing legs, compound eyes and natty hair,
And she knew what he would be thinking...

“This wasn’t Katharine’s day.”



45

PUBLISHER’S NOTE: *Records from 110802MD-010203MD have been redacted in-full and will not be permitted inclusion into the record as compiled, edited and formatted by Tom Shaw.*

“There are two things that reliably inspire curiosity: when your wife’s cell phone is busy and redaction in writing.”

—George Irwin

× **010203MD**

“...any attempt at unifying human ideals in a film predominated by the asymmetry of nature, is in vain. In an attempt to reconcile his characters with the natural world, Antonioni deliberately fails, and so, is successful in usurping an unwarranted unity in favor of a disunity which glorifies the contextual landscape.”

—Patrick Nowell-Smith, in a letter to Esteban Suárez

⁴⁵ ¶ - **MANNAZ**, “MAN.” THE JOYOUS MAN IS DEAR TO HIS KINSMEN; YET EVERY MAN IS DOOMED TO FAIL HIS FELLOW, SINCE THE LORD BY HIS DECREE WILL COMMIT THE VILE CARRION TO THE EARTH. —OLD ENGLISH POEM

MEAT

George Irwin's documentary *Meat* is a comedy, but a tragic one. It operates in a straightforward manner, eschews reflexivity, giving the camera authority over its subjects: tourists and ancestors of the legendary Furnace Creek head hunters, otherwise known as 'cannibals.' The tourists are an awful lot, audacious and impudent, elitist and unconscious. They are curious chimps, self-involved, carrying on the tradition of their colonial ancestors. The only group that appears to have undergone any noticeable evolution are the descendants of the former cannibals, who have acknowledged their situation, dealt with major issues, and resigned themselves to the wisdom that is an effect of linear, pragmatic thought, which is not to imply that they are confined to that method, but that they have espoused a Cartesian paradigm that imparts to them a dignity absent in the tourists. The tourists lust after travel, revel in place-dropping, which is as sickening as name-dropping, and are so incredibly self-assured that one is almost embarrassed to watch them at work.

That the filmmakers have the gall to intrude into the lives of the 'cannibals,' the quality of whose lives has been diminished by the ravages of tidewater colonization, suggests that they are, if not as conceited as the tourists, more conceited. They represent a new breed of cannibal that feeds on the resolve of the living and that are free agents for the 'civilization' of the 'undeveloped' or 'underdeveloped' world—raping, scrambling, smashing up all that remains of the organic, life-giving tidelands.

The notions, elitism and ethnocentrism,⁴⁶ pervade Irwin's *Meat*. There isn't a question in the tourist's minds about their privileged and anointed places in the world. They are *of* civilization; they pity the poor bedraggled 'natives,' leading lives shorn of proper education and modern amenities. It does not occur to them that perhaps it is *they* whose lives are out-of-balance; they who have been

⁴⁶ MANY AFRICAN AND ABORIGINAL CULTURES ARE LIMINAL CULTURES, MEANING THEY CANNOT BOTH CONDUCT HUMAN AFFAIRS PRODUCTIVELY AND MAKE APPEALS TO DEMOCRACY. BUT NON-IRRATIONAL GOVERNANCE MUSTN'T EVER BE PERCEIVED AS EQUIVALENT WITH PRIMITIVENESS. MANY CULTURES HAVE SUCCEEDED BY GOVERNING VIA A FUNCTIONAL 'DREAMTIME.' GRANT ONCE MORE A PEOPLE ACCESS TO 'DREAMTIME' AND A SEMBLANCE OF ORDER RESUMES. THE OUTBACK IS NO PLACE FOR DEMOCRACY. IT IS ALSO NO PLACE FOR WHITES.

overwhelmed by technology, just as they suggest that it is the ‘cannibals’ who have been overwhelmed by nature.

These are old arguments, maybe overused, but no less valid today than 30 years ago. Just by looking, we incur damage. The harm we cause by staring, recording, reviewing and laughing is compounded over time. Palliative movements seek to engender correctives, but they are but band-aids—ineffectual. Man has wreaked havoc on Furnace Creek. If there is one thing that man might have learned by now, it is that we don’t learn from our mistakes. We seem to take a secret pleasure in making them, dredging open old wounds until the blood pours. We aren’t satisfied with slow trickles. We want gratification all at once. It isn’t enough to exploit ‘exotic’ peoples, so we exploit each other.

In *Meat*, the camera is the cannibal—the cannibal on tour. The camera eats souls. The camera operates indiscriminately. Worse, there is a real person operating it, with an eye twinkling behind the viewfinder, cutting, assembling and plotting. No cameraperson is innocent. That the cameraperson does not interact directly with his subjects does not release him from responsibility. But the cameraperson keeps looking because it is easier to hide behind a camera. If you know that the camera is recording, you are no longer accountable yourself—that is the rationale. The conscience is slowly expiring to the recorded image. We rely on cameras to remember for us, and it is memory that does not merely reinforce our conscience, but constructs conscience.

× **010303MD**

LOVE IN IMPERFECT TOWNS

With you on old drives
 Through imperfect towns
 In new cars
 With old hearts and cob-yellow youth
 With the breath of wind wrapped in peach stoles
 And twining fingers with cherry tintured nails
 With feelings less thought
 With eyes like glass blown with bourbon smoke
 And lengths of soft and tarrying noses
 And swifts of cheek

And garlands of hooking arms and rope waists
 And some sutured vessel, busted in some long look
 From still lids while on stilts in tufts of grass
 With lips like eiderdown wishes
 And airless fastnesses in crooks of legs
 Those old drives

× **010403MD**

“It wasn’t his charms; he was so ugly that one was compelled to go back for another look.”

—David Duff

2019

After the assassination of Ambassador James A. Trainer, mothers in Orchard Park changed. They stopped buying Jell-O Pudding Pops, they stopped drugging their kids with Undercover Bears and many stopped hooking. It is no wonder that their daughters changed, too. This is not to say that there weren’t a few mothers who escaped the disenchantment that was the effect of Orchard Park politics at the turn of the century, or that it happened overnight. But the number of mothers that graduated from the world of Bigfoot Pizza and Hot Pockets to skepticism and cynicism, far outnumbered those with a residual interest in Garbage and the Verve. The same women who just a decade before were electrified by the “David Duff Report on Ultra-Aberrant Behavior,” were first shocked by the untimely death of their Ambassador, and then desensitized by the Huggins-Suárez film that documented the tragedy.⁴⁷ What is worse, many of these women were mothers of daughters who come of age in late 90s Orchard Park. The daughters, barely fifteen and sixteen, seventeen and eighteen, exchange the once and great polyethylene dream—the battery-operated dildo—for 2C-B; MDMA belonged to their mothers. So did Frosted Flakes and Crystal Meth.

⁴⁷ OTHER DEATHS INCLUDE LOCAL SINGER-SONGWRITER TINA WILDER (SISTER OF JOURNALIST CASS WILDER) AND POET-ACTIVIST ESTEBAN SUÁREZ.

The quest for artifacts to call their own typifies the cultural climate of their generation. The daughters go to college, where they protest the Third World War, or drop out and protest the Third World War. Think Fells Point, think David Duff, think missiles at Sparrows Point. *Think*. They wear jackboots, neo-Bouffant hair, trench coats and turtlenecks. Then, if they survive the pogroms and the weaponized fluoride and the Esteban Suárez legacy and the James Trainer loyalists; if they survive bad hair and modern entheogens; if they survive, period, then they become adults, watch men walk on Mars, join the Save the Sun Club, marry and finally have daughters that they probably won't abort.

It is now 2019, and there is a new batch of daughters in Orchard Park. They inherit Singularity Day but are still too young to care about the end of World War III. They hear "the Sun is dead" and realize that Floridians didn't always wear long johns to bed. Their grandmothers introduce them to Frosted Flakes. Catharsis comes later.

× **010503MD**

FIRST MONTH

Eliot was wrong;
 January is the cruelest month.
 We think differently in January,
 As though hard thoughts were an antidote for the cold,
 Or action an anesthetic.
 Do we really believe that fury is beautiful?
 When the ground seizes, like a heart,
 And the hanging berries are freeze-dried,
 Will we be wiser for our pains?
 Or will we await the summer berries
 To take our place,
 And watch as they do wrong themselves
 By impersonating nobler fruits?
 I should think that it is in our nature to wait
 Rather than allow winter to arrest our pride,
 And, for once, spare us shame.
 But we think differently in January;
 As if the cool places were not quite cool enough;

As if cruelty could take the robin's place.
 And what rare fascination evicts compassion
 Out from the redoubts of the human heart?
 What careless purchase constrains the will?
 What, but the phantom of surety,
 That is here a flicker, there a whisper.
 When you are your own longing...like an echo;
 When that seam in the rock,
 Where the hard, gray molars bite the sky,
 Alone, might have sheltered you,
 Had you not exchanged faith for the seasons;
 Had the seam not first filled with snow.

× **010603MD**

"The documentary is a fine art; that is, there is a fine line between getting your subject to say what they mean and encouraging them to say what you want."

—George Irwin

DAVID DUFF: *SCORCHED EARTH*

"...there is a bone-chilling awareness of the artist's estrangement from the human beings that are his subjects—his relatives and his friends," says critic Laura Le Croix in her article, "You Can't Wear 16mm," of filmmaker David Duff. "...it's not at all clear," Le Croix continues, "...where Duff's Arriflex stops and Duff begins." Only once, and then by his own hand, is the camera turned on himself. One cannot help but feel that Duff is lagging in an emotional sense, that his development was somehow curtailed prematurely and that he cannot directly interface with his subjects without the aid of the camera. It is hard to celebrate the work of David Duff when what he engenders in his viewers is pity and embarrassment.

Duff is a legend in his own mind, in love with the sound of his own voice, two with his subjects, at the helm of dysfunction. That his subjects consist of family, friends, and fellow 'folk,' confirms his fear of subject matter that might test his innate limits as an artist and filmmaker. He is able to watch what he assumes wont reject him offhandedly. It is disconcerting that he seems totally without scruples when it comes to moments of intimacy, depth, and human

frailty. There are no sacred moments or private moments; he lacks instinct. It is in the groove of his failure to acknowledge the sacred in the everyday that the needles of his audience's criticism finds purchase.

The visual images that Duff collects determine the perspective of the voice he assigns them. The narration is not premeditated but shaped by a series of experiences. The events that those experiences represent inform Duff's commentary, which is self-absorbed and sometimes tedious. Even so, his regard of the action does not approach a level of intimacy, especially with his audience; that is, in the way two lovers are intimate. That he cannot be intimate with the audience suggests that he does not trust his audience and does not trust himself. Behind the camera, he assumes a defensive posture. Absent the camera, Duff would be naked and without identity.

It is clear that Duff is looking for something. He is lost. Thus, he is searching, and the footage he takes is his testimony. The viewer cannot determine whether or not the returns on his investment in his subjects will be appreciable. Nevertheless, the effort is commendable. That he affords his audience a few laughs is also to his credit. Perhaps the joke is on Duff's subjects, as well as on the audience, many of whose perspectives are overblown and inflated with self-importance.

I have the feeling that Duff was driven in part by animal and paternal instincts; he needed to father something, and until he fathers a child of his own, he will father films, which like children, are impressionable, something from nothing, lisping and spitting. If *Scorched Earth* was Duff's baby, then we have to respect that.



"I hope you are joking! That is what we do here, after all: we joke. You must take the joke very seriously!"

—David Duff

GEORGE IRWIN VS. DAVID DUFF

There are several instances in which the philosophies of George Irwin, linguist and cryptographer, and David Duff, sociologist, documentarian and sometime White Nationalist,⁴⁸ converge, and as

many instances when the philosophical stances of the two said figures differ dramatically.

In an introduction to an interview conducted with David Duff, Laura Le Croix suggests that Duff's work has the capacity to "elevate the documentary to an oracular, even anagogic, level that encourages Delphic contemplation of reality" (Le Croix 443). This is a basic tenet or virtue of art that Irwin touts as essential to a work's effectiveness: a work of art must engender a sense of awe that will provoke nothing short of a religious experience in the viewer. In Irwin's view, "the contemplative life is the humane life" (Irwin 26). That is to say, it is not enough for a work of art to merely divert a viewer's attention; it is not enough to ensure that the viewer's experience is pleasurable. In order to function as a work of art, a work must deepen one's understanding of the universe in which he plays a crucial role.

Duff is on a level with Irwin in regard to the ultimate function of art. He remarks: "It's but a vehicle, subject to the whims of design." (Le Croix 448). Similarly, Irwin quotes Plato in an effort to achieve resonance with a reader as yet unfamiliar with the notion that it is the *idea* that is preeminent rather than the work itself: "Admire in works of art not their aesthetic surfaces, but the logic or right reason of their composition." Clearly, to make for the sake of making is insufficient, so long as the product is not informed first and foremost by the intelligence of the maker; by a wisdom accrued by right living and positive intention. In absence of good-will, or dire affection for that art that is the product of action, a thing ceases to be art altogether and becomes a mere good, to be bought, sold, or acquired for acquisition's sake.

Duff is an artist in whom Irwin would place faith, as his work is less work than vocation. It is a calling. He does not create for the sake of creating; his work is not the product of irrationality. It is a means by which Duff becomes capable of contemplating reality, *as it is*. Video is particularly suited to this end, as it is by virtue of design, an elaboration upon perception. More importantly, in so far as video is perishable—subject to relatively rapid decay—it lends to Duff's perception of infinity as understood through things finite, such as video. This notion of the finiteness of video goes hand in hand with his understanding of the work as "the vehicle." "I find

⁴⁸ REFER TO APPENDIX B

that the best method whereby which one may undermine the expectations of one's audience is by utilizing a medium that is subject to decay and interpretation; that is, ideological decay—in so far as ideas are mutable and a function of time" (444).

Irwin, however, might have found certain dissatisfaction in this idea of the immediacy of the medium. Irwin, in fact, might have elevated this notion to the level of either a transgression against art, or a heresy. That is to say, if a work is not designed with a view to permanence—at least in the supra-spiritual or intellectual senses—then it falls short of becoming art, which is not to say that the work is incapable of becoming a good utility, or conversation piece. Irwin would argue that art is not of a time, but of time. It endures to the degree that it addresses certain inalienable human truths; it lasts on the basis of the effectiveness with which it conveys beauty—art is not a fad.

An additional point of contention is the notion of authorship. Duff would argue that a work is made after the image of its author. Often, a work is made simply for the welfare of the work, or for the sake of the audience for whom it has been prepared. But, indeed, it is frequently the case that a work is intended as a means to foster the growth of an artist's reputation, or to augment his personality. There are instances in Duff's work (i.e., *Scorched Earth*, 1996), which operate not only as autobiographical sketches, but as forms of self-portraiture. "If it annoys, it is working. If the documentarian is his own subject, the audience becomes mistrusting—this is the great divide Duff wants to engender" (Le Croix 448). Irwin purports that "a work of art is true to the extent that its actual or accidental form reflects the essential form conceived in the mind of the artist" (Irwin 74). That a mere projection of the artist does indeed "reflect the intention of the artist" is questionable in the case of David Duff, which is not to say that he does not address those basic needs that a thing requires in order to become "art." It is only to say that there is little question that he walks a thin line.

But finally there is reason to close on a positive note; a note that assumes the form of convergence in respect to the philosophies of George Irwin and David Duff, namely, the source of art. Duff addresses his understanding of the source of art/knowledge in an undertaking of the title *Intransigence* (1999). It is an overtly technical piece, but also one that is engineered to encourage the participation of the viewer. On the behalf of *Intransigence*, Duff states:

“Knowledge arises out of our acknowledgement of fallibility—the questionable provenance of all information” (Le Croix 449). Irwin, MIT linguist, would smile.

Irwin, George. A New Radical Philosophy of Art. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1997.

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× **010703MD**

“The written word is our heritage, our connection to the past; it is the beat of the heart transcribed; it is also one of the best ways to romanticize things that might otherwise be condemned.”

—Russell Huggins

KEPT MAN

Eventually a man must choose.
He will choose to be bold.
He will choose to be servile.
He will choose to be brave, cowardly, or ineffectual.
Sooner or later, every man chooses to be something,
Good, bad, or embarrassing.
It may not be a conscious choice.
It may be a choice made early in life or late.
But one thing is certain:
It will be made.

× **010803MD**

“I have traveled much in Orchard Park. That certainly hasn’t gotten me anywhere!”

—Esteban Suárez

“Freedom: one of Imagination’s most despicable bastards.”

—David Duff

“My definition of a free society is a society where it is unsafe to be an altruist.”

—George Irwin

“Libertarianism presupposes that the majority is fit to conduct itself responsibly. Fascism acknowledges that it can’t.”

—Tom Fahy

A TRIBUTE TO AMBASSADOR JAMES A. TRAINER, ON THE OCCASION OF THE 5TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CONCEPTION OF THE IDEA OF THE CONCEPTION OF THE ORCHARD PARK REVOLT OF 1998

You own yourself! What you choose to do with your mind and body is your business. The Orchard Park High Council—*any* council—should not have the authority to intervene on the behalf of the individual. There are consequences, sometimes serious, but the individual must assume responsibility for his own actions. His own actions must not, under any circumstances, be regulated by the government if his choices have not directly harmed another living soul. You must fight against the criminalization of victimless crimes. You must become ideologically sensible. You must educate yourselves that you might speak eloquently and intelligently about your Gods-given rights as an individual. Your rights as an individual do not derive validation from the country of which you are a citizen. Rights by virtue of their innate character travel and are supremely borderless. You must never forget this.

There will come a time when you may have to rally for the sake of your right to simple liberty. On this day, you mustn't meet your oppressors on their terms; you mustn't take up slingshots. You must meet them with that aristocracy that cannot be wrestled under any circumstances from a man's hands; you must meet your oppressors with the mind, armed with reason. And so plain and sensible will be your arguments on the behalf of liberty that you will find your opponents yielding and sympathetic. You would not be wrong to assume that a heroic effort must be summoned for the sake of the cause of liberty. You would not be wrong to suggest that politics will not properly serve liberty's ends. You would not be delusional to argue that the new war, hopefully bloodless, will be fought with ideas. I beg you not arm yourselves. I beg you honor the ideas that serve liberty by brandishing not arms, but proud, able minds.

No rabble can win an ideological war. There are few ideas, save for the very basest, that can survive a democracy. No philosophy that aims to work for the common good will permit the desires that bloom in an individual. And as I look out upon you all today—*all three of you*—I do not see commonness, but a puddle of individuals, each with their own desires, passions, wants. I do not hope that you perceive a host of common threads winding through the mass of you, for it is such a web that is the aim of your oppressors, whom know well that the greatest dangers are posed not by a rabble, but by individuals, capable of thinking independently and critically. It is my hope that you will choose to see through the thin veneer of the cause for which you have been sculpted by your oppressors: *altruism*. No self-respecting individual should set out to make altruism his aim. This will not make you happy men and women. This will not foster the kind of environment in which liberty may thrive. For with altruism and the common good as your aim, you will fell the tree of liberty swiftly and the consequences will be dire. Your body will no longer be your own; it will be a ward of the state. And soon you will see that the good does not require that an individual sublimate himself on anybody's orders.

There is no peace in that culture that does not esteem and respect the individual. Social democracies rise from the ashes of the individual. Yes, *from the ashes*. That is the cost of the common good. On the morrow, look deep into your own eyes, know that there are no other eyes quite like your own anywhere else. Know that if this

war is to be won—this war that is being waged between the individual and his oppressors—than you must cease to sacrifice those qualities that make you unique, that provide sustenance for your individuality: you own yourself. No action that does not harm another is unjust, if it feeds your soul. But the moment you submit to a group, your sovereignty is compromised, and in so far as they depend upon the light of sovereignty, ideas too will be compromised. Ideas do not belong to a rabble. Ideas belong to individuals, who alone are able to hone them, turning them into apt weapons.

You are a mass today, but only in shape. The men and women at your sides have no jurisdiction over you. Similarly, your oppressors in the sleek limousines, in the board rooms, in the halls of congress, in your universities, possess power only so long as you willingly propagate their creed which asks you to serve the common good, to discount the worth of ideas, to suspend your critical faculties. But the moment you suppress action for its own sake, you will have taken your first step down the path of liberty, of independence and of righteousness. Liberty should be the objective of a people, not as a collective, but as a culture of individuals. But such a culture cannot survive a large, centralized form of government or suffer a mixed economy; the mixed economy is a cancer to liberty, as a culture with an economy that wishes to enforce equality subverts the voluntary nature of free-exchange. And the moment the voluntary nature of an economy is suspended and one's labor taxed in a compulsory way, liberty as such, ceases—man becomes a mere tool. And such an economy was not our intended inheritance. No, voluntary free-exchange, both of ideas and goods was our intended inheritance. And ultimately, it does not matter with what one makes an exchange. It may be a promise, it may be bag of coffee beans. What matters is the contract that is struck between two souls—a contract of mutual benefit to both, without the meddling oversight of a governing body. Mediums of exchange may be born to grease the wheels of commerce, but that medium should ideally be the choice of the individual, not the state. But if you would ask the state to subsidize the farm or the doctor or the energy provider or the highways, your concern can not also be for the welfare of the individual. Again, if your concessions are to the group, you consign the individual to a slow and agonizing death and the state will show him no mercy.

Do you see now that the individual is at odds with the notion of the common good? But your oppressors would have you believe that individuality is a crime; that a great society requires each and every one of you to dress each morning as an everyman, ready to do the bidding of the state. For the state cannot stomach your achievements. There would be too many, and many of those achievements would be too good and competition would arise such that an environment of genuine competition would be born and competition is a prime benefactor of individuality. Large governments cannot tolerate the type of liberty typified by unregulated free-exchange. In such an environment the power-hungry are starved as they cannot effortlessly thrive on the fruits of your labor. And this should be our aim my friends—a world in which the individual is free to create and trade and imagine; a world in which ideas are not at the mercy of the rabble and where democracies are not permitted to succeed Republics of the Mind without a fight.

I do not believe our answer can be found in politics, for we would be fighting with our oppressor's tools. Our objections must be reinforced with good ideas, with reasoning minds, with conscientiousness, fortified with historical literacy. We are quickly becoming a society without a past, no longer a culture with a history. So this is no mere war for the individual, but for the very history that substantiates that individual's purpose—our tidewater history. I hope you will all, when our time comes, choose to fight for liberty, for your property, for your right to self-defense and for your very independence. For that day is coming and I fear too few will rise to meet the challenge that is presented them; too few will relinquish the security allegedly guaranteed them by the state; too few will choose to defend the individuality that alone dignifies men on Earth. I just pray that when you are asked to rise in the defense of liberty, you remember that in a cage, the individual has no recourse.

× **010903MD**

I WISH

Here, in blue moonlight,
Like a lost noon,

Hung in the branches of trees,
 Garlanded with husks of blackbirds;
 Here, in a chill wind by a winter window
 In the silent cocoon of night;
 Here, in still air
 With old rocks and dried roses,
 In arms that would reach into frames
 And through walls and into the firmament
 That cradles you.
 Here, in a bed of hemlock and pine
 With your cheek to my chest;
 I wish you were.

× **011003MD**

*“Relativity has nothing do with it, you stupid twit! You’ve got the wrong
guy!”*

—Sergei Eisenstein, filmmaker

Dear George,

Cipher: Louisville

Subject: ...*aftermost*

This will be my last contribution to the cause. I am very weak. I’ve had a stove brought to the second floor. I do all of my dishes in the bathroom sink. But I’m not as desperate as I sound. I have a food-lady, Kaitlin, twice a week; she brings me necessities, even 45s from Buster’s Record Shop if I want them.

There is something large in the north-east wall; I can hear it scratching at night. There has also been a not insignificant structural failure in the roof over Esteban’s old room; water pours down the walls and into my office after every hard rain.

One more thing, George: you have been a genuinely good friend and mentor to me. I have tried to convey the gratitude that I feel toward you on several occasions, but the overt meaning was probably unnecessarily obfuscated, which is our job, after all. What a laugh, right? So, in plain text, I am grateful; grateful for your friendship

and support. This is the part where I somberly relate to you the fate of my estate, but, happily, I have nothing to bequeath; I am officially penniless!

I mention this as I don't want you to think that there is anything that needs to be sorted out or managed-*in the end*. I will die an indigent's death, which is appropriate in light of the somewhat monstrous initiative to which I have lent my peculiar talents over the last decade.

Finally, here is my last contribution—short, sweet and spare, not unlike this short life, and a subject that is of special interest to you:

"LINGUISTICS, AUTOMATISM AND FILM THEORY: HOLLYWOOD IN A NOOSE," BY DAVID DUFF

David Duff traces the evolution of an obscure approach to theoretical film analysis; he excises from factual documentation, evidence of the movie industry's genesis. He highlights ambiguities present in classical film theory and addresses the struggle between positivism and glamour, method and innovation—struggles that motivated early Hollywood cinema.

Unlike the Model T, Duff argues that Hollywood owes its early success not to the utilitarian austerity and positivist rationalism which the popular, albeit unremarkable, vehicle represented, but to the mass-production of *style*. At first, Hollywood was positivist in orientation; through standardization, mechanization and division of labor, Hollywood became a veritable factory and by the early 1930s had the capacity to produce no less than one feature film per week.

Positivist Hollywood sought to reduce complex entities to their elemental parts. It was hoped that this practice would result in a comprehensive understanding of Hollywood as a rationalized production operation. The general assumption: the sum of the parts *does* constitute the whole. But Hollywood wasn't making Model Ts.

Hollywood was making lots of movies but was lacking something fundamental: style. Production for production's sake was not enough. And Sergei Eisenstein had an answer. Eisenstein opposed the automatism of cinema; he considered it a risk. In an effort to override automatism, Eisenstein utilized montage in order to communicate the passion of his political messages.

Others joined the oppositional chorus, among them the French surrealists and impressionists. Where Eisenstein was interested in argument, the French were interested in revelation. Utilizing the concept of *photogénie*—the watchful camera—the French movements sought to render the miraculous in the everyday. Eisenstein regarded this practice as but another valueless form of automatism. He was interested in constructing what Duff calls, "continuity out of the discontinuous." Where the French films were lyrical and contemplative, Eisenstein's were of a 'linguistic' nature, embedded with ideograms.

Commercial filmmaking was never the same. With Eisenstein's linguistic methods as a guide, the classical Hollywood narrative

was born. Photogénie was also incorporated into the Hollywood apparatus in the form of fetishism which intensified the popularity of Hollywood film through the glamorization of everyday objects.

As the title of Duff's article implies, just when cinema appears to be doing well, it climbs a ladder and places its head in a noose. In the early 1950s, Andre Bazin, strongly opposed to the Eisensteinian tradition, argued for a reassessment of film theory. Despite Bazin's efforts, Eisenstein remained central to film theory and would later father the 'semiotic' approach to film analysis. Film theory remains a narrow field; it excludes surrealist/impressionist interests. Also, it appears that the Eisensteinian tradition, positivist in many respects, rational in others, has contributed not so much to the overall ascendancy of Hollywood, as it has to its decline. With the institutionalization of Eisensteinian tradition and the stigmatization of early French movements, Hollywood is more controllable, more predictable, and more replicable; it is Newtonian, political, and finally, *it is boring*.

× **011103MD**

UNTIL MORNING DO US PART

The forest sleeps.
 The fox is in his den,
 The rabbit in her burrow,
 The deer in their snowy berths,
 Enclosed by pickets of wheat-stalks and brambles.
 It is a good night and a quiet night,
 Without wind to stir the snow into restless eddies;
 Without the crisp whispers
 That thread through the naked trees,
 Raising the poor dog's hackles,
 Making him rustle and moan
 In his lair of old wool and down.
 Soon I'll climb into my slip on the shores of sleep.
 I'll listen to the lap and knock
 Of the tidewaters on the hull of my mind.
 I'll think of you,
 With your hand on my heart,
 Leading me into a purse of dreams;
 And inside we'll find a warm redoubt
 Knitted by the architects of time and slumber,
 And there we'll stay...
 ...until morning do us part.

× **011203MD**

Dear Allayne,

I recall that there were many things I wanted to say to you and feelings I wanted to convey. For a long time I thought I had failed spectacularly in my attempt to communicate properly, but I realized you and I shared with one another what we were meant to share, and that we would thereafter have in our hearts preserved, like fossils, a connection afforded each being once per lifetime; a connection that serves as a guarantee that our lives are not purposeless.

This has been a short life, and its glories fewer than I would like. Nevertheless, life's mysteries have increased in proportion to the number of memories I have accumulated. Whether life is a bold and mysterious thing, painted with synchronicities, is a question of whether we choose to remember. That all memories are not created equal is certain, but all memories have value.

My memories of you are sustaining memories; memories that possess an aura pregnant with possibility; memories that serve not only as bookmarks to a particular time and place, but as assurances that our lives are not the sum of a series of unrelated events. So on this note, I end this letter—my *last* letter to you. I wish you happiness, fulfillment and meaning. You have contributed so much of each of these things to my life.

Always,

Russell

× **011303MD**

YOU ARE...

The thread
With which my heart is sewn,
The minerals
That keep my bones hard,
The silent whispers
That kiss my neck;
You are

The shades
 That cover my eyes when sleep comes,
 The sound
 Of the memory of birds in my ears;
 You are
 The spring
 From which my wishes flow,
 The flutter
 Of silk wings in my stomach;
 You are...
 ...these things.

× **011403MD**

“It is apparent, then, that no single element within Button House possessed a greater degree of criticality than the others. Contrarily, every element, facilitated by line and color, aided Huggins in the final consummation of the distinctive expression of an ambivalent state, the significance of which lay not in resolution but in the inquiries that it demanded.”

—George Irwin

RAZORBACK SUCKER

So the guy says the lures work
 Real well with trout:
 “Real good,” he says,
 “And some other fishes, too,”
 But not to worry much about that,
The other fishes.
 So I don’t,
 And I go down to the fishing hole,
 The one by the bridge,
 Start casting,
 And not a minute passes
 Before the fishing pole is thrashing about,
 Scoliotic, the reel smoking and hot to the touch,
 And I’m being dragged down the bank,
 Heels biting the gravel.
 “This ain’t any trout!” I yell.

I see these fins
With silver serrated edges slice the water,
Rows of pointy teeth, hard as diamonds.
The fish bucks, dives...
I trip and the fishing line
Gets wrapped around my arm, my leg,
My neck and I'm in the water, going down,
Fast, pulled by this mad fish
With broken glass scales and a rubber sneer.
I feel my knee explode against a boulder.
I swallow mouthfuls of brown water.
My cheekbone shatters against another boulder
And I feel my eye implode,
The socket filling with sand.
The fish keeps snapping its tail back and forth,
Keeps diving.
I will lose consciousness,
I know it.
And I have time to be angry
At the guy that sold me the fishing lure;
Mad at his whole family, his children,
His aunts and uncles, his dog.
The fishing line slackens.
I am still too deep to breath,
But I am no longer being dragged at high speed.
I think about climbing to the surface
But I am tired, my leg won't work
And I am blind;
I can't see any light
And I'm worried the fish will double back,
Swallow me whole, devour me limb by limb,
Lick its lips, burp.
The fish has doubled back.
I can feel her cold shadow absorb me,
Its pointy teeth sink into my graying flesh;
My other eye pops,
My arm separates from my body at the shoulder.
Yes, I am being eaten...

Alive.

I have a minute, yet, before I die,

So I imagine wrapping the salesman's head in Saran Wrap,
 Holding him under water,
 Listening to him gulp his last breath,
 Scream, eyes bulging.
 And he says something, something I can barely hear,
 Something muffled by the water...
 I laugh a little bit,
 Laugh while I hold his head under water,
 Until he stops flailing.
 But really somewhere he's on a picnic
 With his family, his aunts and uncles,
 His children, his dog;
 And I'm stuck in this bitch's stomach.
 I'm going to die.

× **011503MD**

SURGEON GENERAL ENDORSES WHISKEY

By Laura Le Croix, the Gazette, Orchard Park, MD

Vice Admiral Charles Livingston, Jr., M.D., M.P.H., FACS, 21st Surgeon General of the United States Public Health Service, recently chaired a study conducted by Oxford University's Department of Medical Sciences' Nuffield Department of Clinical Laboratory Sciences. The 3-year long study concluded 14 January utilizing three male and three female subjects aimed to determine the long-term effects of whiskey on frontal-lobe cellular density.

"The clinical determinations were nothing short of stunning," said Dr. Livingston at a recent Oxford University Press Conference. "This study has determined that not only does brain cell density undergo a heretofore unobserved free-form natural selection, but that certain of the oft understudied parietal lobe cells undergo accelerated growth, combined with heightened electrochemical activity in said area."

When asked to relate the findings in layman's terms, the Admiral offered the following: "A herd of buffalo can move only as fast as the slowest buffalo, and when the herd is hunted, it is the slowest and weakest ones at the back that are killed first. This natural selection is good for the herd as a whole, because the general speed

and health of the whole group keeps improving by the regular culling of the weakest members. In much the same way, the human brain can only operate as fast as the slowest brain cells. Excessive intake of alcohol, we all know, kills off brain cells, but naturally it attacks the slowest and weakest brain cells first. In this way, regular consumption of whiskey eliminates the weaker brain cells, constantly making the brain a faster and more efficient machine.”

When queried about whether or not the study would alter the shape of the American’s frequently-cited “Food Guide Pyramid,” the Surgeon General responded: “I don’t know if it is going to alter the pyramid for the majority of Americans, but it is certainly going to alter the shape of mine!”

× **011603MD**

THE LONG DAY

My day began badly. At 7:30 I hit a small girl. She was eleven. She appeared suddenly, as a small girl will; waltzed into the road. I braked, we connected, and the car propelled her several feet through the air; she sustained no broken bones.

Cops were summoned to the scene. One asked, “You didn’t swerve?”

It never occurred to me. “Well,” I said, “you know what they say about swerving.” I hoped he knew, because I didn’t.

The officer scribbled something, exchanged a look with his partner and said they’d be in touch. The girl was fine.

I inspected the bumper. There was a small smudge (she was a small girl); I wiped it with my elbow until my reflection was clear.

At the office I bumped into Todd Veldt; we wore a version of the same suit; his didn’t fit as well. “Running late?”

“I hit someone; a girl,” I said.

“Good, good; see you, then.”

Upstairs, next to Princess the secretary, sat a stack of untouched memos and a silver thermos; three lights on her phone were blinking. I might have said something but she was painting her nails.

I spent the better part of an hour sorting mail, diverting phone calls and spraying Glade—I watched the vapor twinkle in the

sunlight. At 10:00, I took my first phone call. It was Lucy; she wanted to meet me for lunch. I said I was busy.

At 11:00, restless, I went around the corner to Nigel Square.

In the street I met Veldt and we exchanged a grimace. "It's your birthday, isn't it?"

I shrugged and walked quickly away.

There were no benches so I sat on a slide. I had to fight for a spot; it was crawling with St. Peter's kids on recess. Nearby stood a hard-looking nun. She was eyeing me suspiciously. The nun blew a whistle and the kids froze, then they leapt from the jungle gym, shimmied down poles, and scrambled toward the nun, forming a messy line. She led them in the direction of St. Peter's. I laid down on the hot metal slide, my knees dangling at 90 degree angles, and fell asleep. I woke up at 3:00. I was famished.

At a magazine kiosk I bought a hotdog, ate half and left the second half in the revolving door of my office building. Princess wasn't at her desk and the lights on her phone had stopped blinking. The pile of memos was still untouched, but the thermos was gone.

I sat in my office for ten minutes, threw the can of Glade in the briefcase and made a mad dash for the elevator where I met Veldt. "Leaving early?"

I shrugged. Veldt lifted his leg and looked at the bottom of his shoe.

"What is it, Todd?" I asked.

"The revolving door! Some royal fuck left a hotdog on the floor!"

On the way home I hit a medium-sized kid: a boy. This time I swerved, but I hit him anyway. I propped the kid up in the passenger seat, buckled him in. On the way to the hospital I asked him if he wanted to change the radio station. He didn't answer. He was slumped over like a rag doll.

I carried him into the emergency room, called out over the din but couldn't get anyone's attention. A woman in the crowded waiting room got up from her chair and I put the kid in her place. He was bleeding from his mouth. I stepped away and he slid out of the chair. No one noticed, so I left.

It was getting dark and it took me several minutes to find the car. I got in, started the engine but only one headlamp came to life. *Why did I swerve?* I asked myself. On the seat sat the kid's knapsack.

I navigated the car out of the parking lot, slowed by a dumpster and tossed the kid's bag. I was exhausted. It had been a long day and they would only get longer.

× **020203MD**

"The only thing worse than the post-postmodern novel, is the post-postmodern novel written by a semiotician."

—George Irwin

CABLE FROM MANGROVE CAY

"Always speak when you pass someone on the path."
 The wrinkled man was a Mayan delegate.
 "Come to Mexico. Come climb the Pyramid of the Sun.
 There are other tombs than these."
 On the street, walking on planks, I heard:
 "Passages in the old house;
 Halls behind the girl's room—"

Thirsty?

"Something that won't melt the ice," I said.
 I was thinking about the force of memory
 When the old cop came in—
 "He lost his wife to Secretariat."
 I shook my head, watched the ice-cubes melt—
 "How does a man lose his wife to a horse?"
 He said,
 "Horses mean different things to different people."
 The ice melted, pooled like things foregone.
 Last night as I left the office, the lights winking—
If you can't hear, your responsibility is to see.
 I said nothing.
Is it so hard to watch?
You'll remember what causes you pain.
 "May I drink?"

There was a beeping procession on Circle Street,
 Bumpers and reflexes—

Cemetery Bar—fewer lights, more people.
There are two worlds: the underworld and the bar.

Buy you a drink?

“You’d regret it.”

Try me.

“No, really, I won’t reciprocate.
I have to be somewhere,” I told my melting ice-cubes.
The dog is losing weight. They think its cancer.

Archetype: She has brown hair, glasses; perfect teeth;
She is well-kept, clean and generally humorless.

Don’t be fooled by her laughter.

It isn’t irony, but embarrassment.

“I am a Libra.”

I understand.

Dr. St. Claire asked, “Okay, why this contempt?”

“It isn’t contempt,” I said.

“Women deserve good lovers.”

Where do you fit in?

“Is that relevant?”

I would hope so.

Don’t disqualify sense.

One man, one woman—

They think already of last things...

“January is an irrelevant month.

Desperation is the rule.

He didn’t even shave for her;

Every woman deserves a clean-shaven man—

She’s worth it...”

“I don’t understand,” St. Claire complained.

“Already her smile changes...”

You are afraid of change?

“I am afraid of...*something*.”

I knew her in another life.

Once in a dream—

Red flags, sirens.

Hooded eyes; reader’s squint—

She was always speculating:

Would the flowers bloom on time?
 Would the child wake at midnight?
 She knew the moment the milk would spoil—
 The instant the apples would fall—
You're a romantic after all!
 “No.”

She used to say, “In the olden days,
 They rejected people with flat feet.”
She had my undivided attention.
 I asked only for her soul.
You asked a great deal of her.
 “She wasn’t obliged to give anything.”

There was a procession on Circle Street...
 I was smoking.
 “What doesn’t die with man?”
What is remembered by others?
 “And even that doesn’t belong to him.
 I want something more substantial than a shadow!”
My name is Dr. St. Claire. I like dogs.
 The greatest thing a man can do is adopt a creature
 That is guaranteed to die while he is alive.
Do you have a lover?
 “I have something more ambiguous.”

I would be shocked if she were interested in this man.
 She’d give desperation a new name.
 Can’t you see she’s sinking?
 Throw her a bone.
 Why are intellectuals nasal?
 Who doesn’t want to be held?
 “Did you know,” St. Claire began,
 “That there is a facial expression for regret?”
 “I never thought about it,” I replied.

Think about it.
 When did we become so fickle?
 One lemon or two;
 The green tomato or the red;
 We still commit blood sacrifice—

We are pale for a reason.

“Choice is a privilege,” she said.

“Breathing is a privilege,” I replied, poking at a plant.

“Do you pray?” she asked.

“I talk to a tree.”

“A tree?” she asked.

If we all could save at least one thing in our lifetime,

Just imagine...

Crossing Circle Street, fountains burbling,

Splashing, slapping cement, I remembered—

Look. Watch. Listen.

“I don’t feel up to it.”

I said nothing about feeling.

“I don’t pray. I query. I talk to the ceiling.

My queries are ceiling-directed.

I don’t ask for answers.”

“You would no longer ask her to answer?” asked St. Claire.

“The future is not a woman.”

We spent a night in Oaxaca.

“You’d be wise to walk,” the voice said.

“Take the tunas with you.”

“What if the sky opens up? I heard thunder.”

“Find a tomb at four o’clock.

Imagine your lover’s eyes.”

It was the Mayan delegate.

“Are you following me?”

“Imagine your lover’s eyes. When the sky closes...”

“I can’t hear you! It’s the fountains!”

“When a man loses hope, he leaves his country.”

“Cowardice?” wondered St. Claire.

“Something,” I said.

Mangrove Cay, La Isla del Espiritu Santo

There are several brands of commitment.

One commits either to stillness or to movement.

But God taxes movement—

“Look at these wrinkles.”

Why don’t you marry?

“My illusions are too few.

The Brujo said I was a bargain;
I was flattered.”
“So Mangrove Cay?” she asked.

Leroy and Sylvia Bannister:
I slept in their daughter’s room...
With wooden horses, under flower print;
My queries were ceiling-directed.
Instead of birds I heard the Mayan:
“Come climb the Pyramid of the Sun!”
“Will you go back to the office?” asked St. Claire.
“I am finished.”
Finished?

I woke with dew in my eyes.
The sun was a prism.
The house was filled with bone fishermen.
They thought the writer was a diver.
“Take me to the Tongue of the Ocean,” I said.
I nailed the typewriter to the reef.
Will you go back to the office?
“Have I run out of time?”
For now

× **020303MD**

“I wasn’t angry because he left me nothing. I was angry because he swore he’d come back!”

—Katharine Huggins-Cairns

THE END: *I AM NOT HERE...: OR, CHIMERA*

You have one or several objectives:
You can see each one clearly,
Lined up, like little soldiers,
Epaulets sparkling in the noon-light,
Features stolid.

But you are immobilized, stricken,
 Cooling metal settling into the interstices between your joints.
 You feel a clammy, chill current
 Circulating around your naked arms, legs, chest...

If you lay very still,
 concentrate on your breathing,
 concentrate on the weather in the room,
 the landscape of peeling plaster and paint on the ceiling,
 the water stains, the squirrel on the windowsill;

If you can manage
 to simply concentrate on some or all of the above,
 then the creeping stiffness in your knuckles
 that turns your fingertips inward toward your palms...
 ...might ease.

You hold a syringe plunger
 Between your pointer and middle finger;
 The needle drips a yellow, syrupy substance
 That will buy you nerve and time;
 Time to finish what you started.

In the next room,
 bare shuffling feet—
 familiar feet with miniature toes,
 clipped toenails, sun-browned skin,
 pale webbing, lovely arches...

...and with your eyes clenched shut,
 You know she stands in the open window,
 Her skirt billowing in the soft breeze,
 Her features too taut,
 Her own hands clenched.

She's waiting for you to stick the needle in your arm,
 Slam the plunger home;
 Waiting for you to go half into the arms of death
 And back—back to her for a little longer.

She wants you to get up out of death's lap,
 Creep up behind her,
 Wrap your arms around her waist,
 Rest your chin on her shoulder,
 Bury your nose in her sweet-smelling hair.

So I visualize the imaginary apparatus,
 The pulleys and gears
 That would lift my right hand into the air;

Visualize the night-nurse in black
 That emerges from the shadows, in the corner,
 To take my hand in her own, steady it;

Visualize Chimera that stealthy struts,
 Pointing with his horned head
 To the thumping vein in my arm.

And while the night-nurse,
 Translucent in daylight,
 Strokes Chimera's tufted neck,
 She glides the needle into the vein,
 Buries it, blood mixing with the [+++++],
 The plunger depressed,
 The syringe emptied.

Your pulse quickens.
 Chimera's scalding breath whistles in your ears.

The night nurse—
 You can't see her,
 But you hear the familiar whistle that comes from her bodice—
 Removes the ice-cold rod from her sleeve
 And has raised it high above your head,
 Into the ceiling,
 Scraping plaster,
 Digging into rotten wood,
 Then down again in a screaming blur.

And a thousand filaments explode behind your eyelids
 As the pipe crushes your face,
 Sending splinters from the bridge of your nose
 Into the back of your throat.
 Your cheekbones collapse,
 Separate from your eye-sockets,
 Tunnel into the back of your head;
 Your jaw unhinges,
 Flops onto your neck.

The act precedes all sensation—
 the swift disassembly.

And just as quickly as your face was crushed,
 It pops back into shape,
 The scalded air in your throat softens,
 Cools, circulates.
 Chimera struts out the door and down the hall;
 The night-nurse follows,
 Dragging her bloody pipe behind.

You open your eyes;
 Register the ragged walls, the dated furniture,
 The dry-rotted floor and the moth-eaten curtains.
 You flex your fingers,
 Elbows, knees and toes.
 And with the force of habit,
 Spill off the side of the bed,
 The needle still swinging from your vein.
 You wait until the days of the week,
 Months of the year
 And names of the angels return to you...

...and then you go to her,
 Because nature is at the mercy of a creature that can choose.
 And you choose her: *Allayne*.

× 020403MD

“Notions: they come as signs on the wind, or as flocks, dispersing when the tree on which they land shrugs. So with men; we cannot account for the place they occupy in our heart; they come and stay for a season, or two. Sometimes they leave a piece of themselves—an imprint, and sometimes not. They leave, fade like a sign on the wind. And we can’t argue; the valley and sky will conspire to muffle our protest.”

—Allayne Ashby, Rehoboth, 1998

THE WYLD

Russell—he talked about intensity. I didn’t respond. I ignored him. I paid for my arrogance: Loneliness. *I paid for my loneliness.* Pace yourself—a run in the woods. She went for a run in the woods. She was lost. A little scared. It was her memories that frightened her. She didn’t like to be alone with her memories. Not now. Not in the woods. Here, the memories had voices. They spoke to her. Some had sinister whispery voices; others guttural or throaty voices. A few simply rasped. She was lost. No one could help her. Her memories isolated her from others. They shielded her from the outside world. Her world was self-contained, black, and inhospitable. Now she was lost. The trees looked alike. They didn’t have names. They couldn’t speak. Not in the same way that her memories could speak. She was alone. She couldn’t move. Not backwards or forwards. She had no drive, no gears, and no motivation. It was all the same to her. *Russell.* He wasn’t a bad memory. She could stand to remember Russell, because he was kind; because he believed in constancy. He was a little boring but he was nice. He wasn’t even boring, really—he was *content*. And contentment bothered her. He didn’t care about motion. He was happy to sit still and talk to her. What happened to Russell? She didn’t know. He finally left...*too soon.* She wasn’t ready. He had warned her but she thought that he would change. He didn’t. He left. Just like he said he would. But he came back, didn’t he? He was older and his hair was shorter. He was thinner too. And she couldn’t accept him; because he had left her. He never said why. *Russell.* She wanted Russell back. Then she wouldn’t feel so lost. Russell had a wonderful sense of direction. It was all inside of his

head. He knew where north was; he knew where south, east and west were; even if you spun him in circles, and blindfolded him. He knew. And that's why she had loved him, even if he was difficult to love. If only he had believed in the constancy of love...He believed in the constancy of everything else. And she had really given all of herself to him. She had sacrificed herself. He didn't realize what a gift she had made of herself. And when he left, he took her heart with him. But he didn't realize it. Russell had an agenda, and she wasn't a part of it. That was okay, though, wasn't it? After all, he had warned her. And did she listen? Of course not; she thought she could change him. She had failed. Maybe Russell was different now, wherever he was. Maybe he could sense that she was lost, and would come for her. Come running through the woods, like he did early in the morning. He would wake up while she was still asleep and go for a run in the woods. He always knew where he was, path or no path. He always knew his way home. She imagined that he thought she was his home; that she was true north, but she wasn't, was she? He was a heartbreaker, a bomb, and he blew up in her face; a bomb that left a crater in her heart. But he was honest. He had told her that he was fickle. She didn't resent Russell, however. He was honest, when the others weren't. These were her memories. Now, lost in the woods, she was alone with them. She was going to have to move now. Her legs felt stiff, her arms heavy. Her head was pounding. Why did the trees all look the same? She wished that they could speak, give directions. It was getting darker. The sky was red and it shown weakly through the treetops. She could feel the closeness of the sky. It seemed to press down on her, making her flaxen hair tug on their roots, her shoulders to slope, and her knees to buckle. She would feel better if she moved. She could turn around, return in the direction from which she had come. But she couldn't remember from what direction she had come. Had she run up a little hill? Was that it over there?

× 020503MD

**THE NIGEL PARK DINER DEBATE CLUB CONVENE AT
BUTTON HOUSE, 2ND FLOOR ATELIER: *THE FINAL DEBATE***

“What bearing does your statement have on the issue?”

“It has none, apparently.”

“Exactly—it is a logical fallacy. A logical fallacy in this context will lead to an Argumentum ad Logicam—*an argument from fallacy!*”

“What is the problem?”

“All conclusions will be false; that is the problem, and not a small one!”

“But this isn’t a rational world.”

“True.”

“It isn’t a logical world.”

“No, it isn’t, I agree.”

“So, illogic inspires debate—debate that does not subscribe to reason.”

“But only if your opponent comprehends fully the requirements of illogical debate.”

“Oh, right, of course, he must understand fully.”

“And he *does*.”

× 020603MD

THE MINE AND THE WHARF

A coal-black wraith
From a desperate mine,
Paying for time with canaries.
In alabaster, the accountants,
Fuzzy behind smoked windowpanes

Evening, the color of salamanders.
The wicket rattles in its frame.
The witch’s cudgel
Evicts a battened hare
From a dampen burrow.
Into the soot-night
Smoky tufts pop and rise;

Blood cricks
Soak char and dead burs.

Swollen fruit on spruce planks.
In porcelain, crisp like an iceberg,
Plump, pitch-colored hands
Prepared for pot roast,
Curried jams...

In a wooden rocker
Like a shack on the wharf,
Glowing before the brick hearth:
Smelted toes, a trunk like a smokestack,
Felted overalls and ears like patched tires.

× **020703MD**

“Liberty: it is a scourge; I would sooner defend the late David Duff.”

—George Irwin

THE FEBRUARY REVOLUTION

Until we are able to call a spade a spade, developing a requisite immunity to the dissension that is the offspring of factionalism, there can be no cohesion in rebellion. Until we think like the despots that would take for granted our apparent impotence, then it will be by our own feckless agency that ruin is visited upon Imagination. It is our own savagery and immoderacy on which the guiding hands of despotism count, and it is the subversion of both qualities by our own wills that may alone enable us to overwhelm absolute despotism and its agents.

I do not know for what cause the Booboisie⁴⁹ work; it is poorly articulated and rife with the dissension that is our common enemy's aim. But if your interest is indeed Imagination, then you will begin to organize. You will make personal sacrifices. You will train. You will become historically literate. You will foster in your children the

⁴⁹ **BOOB·OI·SIE** ("BÜB-"WÄ-'ZEE), N. A SEGMENT OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC COMPOSED OF UNEDUCATED, UNCULTURED PERSONS. [H.L. MENCKEN, 1922]

capacity to think critically. And finally, you will cease to engage in battles for ideas with which you cannot foster change—ideas designed to enforce psychological gridlock.

If you desire change, you must stop dead in its tracks the machinery of despotism, or be willing to die trying. No longer can words alone but *deeds* castrate that monster. Muster the initiative to organize yourselves, simplify and concentrate on a singular aim: Imagination. You are not impotent, but you mustn't wait for the day when you are forced to beg for the right to exist. Lastly, abstraction is a quagmire—it fosters the kind of empty eloquence that puts man to sleep. Our enemy is not an abstraction. It is not invulnerable. It can be compromised and swiftly. How? Personal initiative is its single greatest threat. One man with a little initiative is able to do the work of many. Develop a sense of personal initiative and withdraw. The tools at our disposal have been designed to evince the illusion of cohesion but in the final analysis succeed principally in isolating one from another. Step back. Learn to speak eloquently and intelligently on the behalf of Imagination for it has long been the target of our common enemy. No one can presume to know the truth. History is vulnerable to falsification and we are all privy to the same information, the veracity of which is suspect. Nevertheless, we all have access to that unique and universal faculty: Imagination. And we all know when that faculty is being subverted; when the natural rights that extend therefrom are eroded.

But rebellion cannot succeed if absent is the ability to think critically and apply the wisdom that was meant to be our inheritance. And even then one must permit a creeping doubt into his intellection, as it tempers a sometimes poorly informed zeal for frivolous causes. However, if the preservation of Imagination is our aim, then our collective cause is not frivolous. But it is important to remember that no battle waged in its name has been bloodless. Your enemies live and breathe among you but have no loyalty to Imagination. They have divided you, factionalized you, brought mediocrity to your shores, and replaced the rule of law with the rule of men. They have robbed you of savings, of a decent education and finally of your property. You are no longer free men and women.

And there may come a time when you no longer have recourse to rebellion, but there is dignity in taking to the grave a sound mind.

Do what you must to develop a sound mind, as it is one thing against which our enemy has few defenses. Our enemies were the first moral and intellectual relativists, for whom the end always justified the means. They were Bolsheviks, and in Bolshevism's eyes, you are mere capital—*human capital*. So, finally, the guiding hand of absolute despotism: the Bolsheviks among you. These are the grandchildren and great grandchildren of the November Revolution. And a no less insidious revolution, albeit thus far bloodless, has been waged and almost won in our own country by grace of that battle having been waged first on the mind.

Until you reclaim your minds, no rebellion, armed or otherwise can be sustained and won. Seek an aim that will foster cohesion, for from your disjointed zeal has arisen a tower of babble. Identify your enemy and determine his weakness. I think you will find it is his mortal terror of the Imagination.

× **020803MD**

“Death likes a surprise: it comes in the black of night, places a cupped hand over the mouth and nose of the living and hovers patiently until they expire—little dying wicks—they flicker, sputter and wink out. Death: it could come tonight, or tomorrow; now. Death will come and you won't be ready; you will hum and haw, but in the end you will lose. You can't strike a bargain with death; it is final.”

—David Duff

THE LONG, LONG EPITAPH: I AM A FICKLE MAN

I do not lay awake, thinking of you.
 Promises.
 Tell me, would you ask so much of me;
 Would you beg constancy of me;
 Are you worth all that, really?
 Accuse me of infidelity!
 Call me a heartbreaker!
 You won't be wrong,
 For I know whimsy well,
 Am given to it...often.
 Am I motivated—filled with intention?

No, the truth is worse:
 I am a fickle man.
 My loyalties are few:
 A shrinking platoon, a caving nest,
 Somewhere, a naked hen,
 Some others, all without faces.
 They too, unfriendly, disheveled,
 Stale, care-worn, of another time.
 Am I accountable?
 Probably, and I own my sins.
 That I do not feel shame
 Causes me some worry,
 For I am pitiless and bold.
 I no longer lie, nor can I.
 I am what I am, but don't lament me,
 Or mourn the once yielding heart;
 I am a fickle man.
 Too soon, perhaps, but nonetheless,
 Fickle.
 Call me a con man,
 A pill, a trip, whatever;
 You won't be wrong.
 I was soft, and the wind strong.
 It blew, and I slowly bent,
 Cowed, a twisted thing,
 Made an enemy, to all but thine own self,
 For there is nothing uglier
 Than a twisted thing
 That holds a vigil for his stillborn heart.
 And the hoary horns will blow,
 The hoary horns will blow,
 And I alone will listen,
 My ear to the wall;
 And I alone will answer...*honestly!*
 You will not like it.
 It will be as an unwanted birth,
 Every thought, an orphan;
 Every breath, at once forsaken and irretrievable!
 My countenance, lost on you,
 My words, soon forgotten.

Then you will know,
 When I cap the fount at which you drink,
 And as I all but wean you:
 I am a fickle man.

× **020903MD**

*“As soon as I point this camera in your face, you are my servant, and by
 God, you’ll cry when I tell you to cry.”*

—George Irwin, on the set of *Meat*

VANISHING POINT

Even as she was irresistible
 In the part she played,
 And even in the lobby, by the fountain,
 The doors thrown back, the cool air
 Resting in a heap around a sea of ankles;
 Even then, touching her arm, leaning into her face,
 As much to hear yourself, as to hear her breathe;
 Even then, as a man possessed;
 And you thought that everything...
 ...that *all* should be well,
 If only you had a clean corner in which to work,
 A desk and a wall on which to hang photographs;
 Even as you were beside her, beside yourself,
 Touching her arm,
 Leaning in;
 And up close, closer, her chest heaving,
 She was smaller than you remembered,
 Sweeter—a boiled currant,
 And you would let her know,
 How you were affected by her part—
 Even as she was almost inaudible—
 How she affected you,
 In spite of the bad balcony seat,
 In spite of the nauseating lighting, and most of all,
 In spite of *you*, unaware.
 Overtaken by the woman,

That would sublimate her role,
 Eschew her sense of self in favor of it;
 Delve deeper into the costume
 Than into her own skin;
 And she expected you, in some form, shape;
 Sought your face in the crowd,
 But the unreality was too much,
 And the cast ill-fitted;
 And you, sunken in your seat,
 Your heart scarcely beating, her mother behind you,
 Her brother beside you,
 The ceiling fans churning the air,
 Redolent with make-up and cologne, electricity and upholstery;
 The theater, like a new car, waiting to be sat in,
 And once sat in, becoming old.

× **040103MD**

"I'm not a proponent of obfuscation, but it's the only way I can say what I mean."

—George Irwin

"If you don't mind, I don't feel like sitting; it's too cold; I have to keep the blood circulating. One cannot write well when it is cold. I think about Flaubert in an overcoat, snowdrifts pressing against the chateau windowpanes. Flapping gusts like frozen doves fly down the chimney, snuff out the little flames that lick wet logs. He shivers like a peasant. He dips his quill into a pot of cold ink, sketches the shivering bones of Madame Bovary—dressed and undressed, alive and dead; rosy and blue.

Chekov sits by a pot-bellied stove, eats biscuits and sips a mug of something lukewarm. His thoughts are perishable—if only it was a little warmer and his fingertips weren't so numb. Will the old walls—packed with rat nests, moldering leaves, and rotting newspapers—hold until spring?"

—Russell Huggins

“The would-be writer must read aggressively, observe dispassionately and lose himself utterly. Unless he lives exclusively for the sake of words, a man is not a writer; he is merely a man that writes. This is a tragedy.”

—Brian Todd Huggins

“You keep referring to ‘we.’ Is there more than one of you?”

—Jennifer Hammitt

“I don’t believe in human possession, but as God is my witness, I am a different man in Annapolis.”

—Russell Huggins

EVERYTHING IS ENCRYPTED: CONSCIOUSNESS, SCHIZOPHRENIA, QUASI-TEMPORAL EVOLUTIONARY MECHANISMS AND IMAGINATION

Social and cultural parameters may be defined as those forces that precede the would-be author, and are embedded in the system that would foster his development. A system may be defined as any ideological construct that determines the prevailing phenomena of a culture and which serve as points of reference as the legislative underpinnings of a culture are devised, accepted and internalized by a corporeal body. Parameters, to the extent that they are integrated into a social mechanism in such a way that thought is largely dependent upon their presence, inevitably influence all aspects of that culture, and become sewn into its collective unconscious. This sense of prevalence of parameters, or preconditions to social organization, unduly influence the corporeal body and jeopardize that process which is a natural prerequisite of the creative agenda that is primary in man—namely, *imagination*.

Parameters are a precondition for conformity in a post-industrial, chip-based culture, and moderate behavior in a way that problematize the individual’s pursuit of self-awareness.

Schizophrenia → It may be argued that schizophrenia is a natural precursor to identity; identity being the outcome of several episodes within the first several years of a child’s life that are

characterized by patently psychotic signifiers which are the artifacts left by the juvenile mind's attempt to acquire a life-paradigm best suited to environmental adaptation. This is the condition that may be said to accompany the development of self-awareness. The mind—the *juvenile* mind—works frantically to conform and adapt to environmental cues. Psychological instability is the result, as the juvenile mind is undergoing a profound sea-change—a constant reorganization in its pursuit of a “path of least resistance” which will enable it to grow increasingly adept at the acquisition of survival skills. It is obvious, then, that psychoses and schizophrenia are natural precursors to self-awareness, occurring in the juvenile mind out of necessity—but what of the adult mind?

The Result → A corporeal body in which the schizophrenic has been unfairly demonized. Schizophrenia is not regarded as a natural precursor to self-awareness or as a catalyst to dynamic consciousness. Alas, it is deemed a “disorder,” and in dire need of correction. It is not deemed of consequence, or perceived as a phenomenon that contributes to the mental health of an individual. Again, it is a disorder. Conversely, I posit that schizophrenia precedes necessary changes in the mind concerning, but not exclusive to, Identity. As it is our purpose herein to champion the cause of the writer, it would best serve our ends to relate the development of Identity to the process of writing, or creativity generally.

Creation → It is not *the* brain-child, but *a* brain-child; it is the consequence of self-awareness. In so far as a being is self-aware, so too does it possess the faculty to create. Creation may be perceived as a being's attempt to externalize the brain's unflinching efforts to foster not only consciousness but to perfect the architecture that would support it. The conscious being is two with itself to the extent that it operates seemingly independently from the mind. There is consciousness, which is the child of the mind, and the built world which is the child of consciousness. Creation proceeds from consciousness, and sensory stimuli (man's creations)—which are the product of the ingenuity of consciousness—flow backward as visual cues informing the brain of changes in the environment and affecting the necessary physiochemical changes that will enable environmental adaptation. This is a very strong evolutionary

mechanism that induces change rapidly and efficiently but which also points to the notion that the mind is perpetually ‘in-transition’ and at risk of instability as its architecture is modified in order to accommodate rapid change exterior to it.

Already we have introduced the idea of social and cultural parameters, and have implied their role in post-industrial, chip-based cultures. Parameters are a natural byproduct of the order that is a result of mechanization. Mechanization requires consistency and relative changelessness over extended periods of time. Efficiency is a function of time. It follows, then, that in order for a mechanism to function in an efficient and predictable manner, it must not be unduly influenced by temporality. It must overcome inertia and then compensate for performance variables that are the result of friction, gravity, and general wear by drawing additional power from reserves constructed expressly for that purpose. In the built world, there are few exceptions to this rule; all things wear down—*eventually*. Nevertheless, the magic of machines is their singular ability to perform consistently over extended periods of time. And over time, as machines become increasingly dependable, and calibrated in an effort to maximize efficiency, so too are human beings expected to run in such an exotic and timely fashion.

The Gear → The industrial revolution owed its success to this pre-industrial advent; gears, attached to spools, attached to shafts, compounded by additional gears with teeth of various sizes, placed evenly, enabled machines to function smoothly and predictably. Gears served machines that were eventually responsible for producing man’s basic needs, and man soon was required to wake for the sake of machines that he might tend them, maintain them and secure their efficiency. Man was living and dying, sleeping and waking, by the dictates of his creations. Time was determined by the rate at which the gear turned. But again, the gear was unflinchingly consistent and soon it begged consistency of its progenitors.

But man, by nature, is inconsistent. Terrific changes—experimental, social, and cultural—engender terrific inconsistencies in man as time is required, as we have shown, for the mind to modify the architecture on which consciousness depends. At times of accelerated change, the incidence of schizophrenia increases, and serves as a primary indicator of widespread evolutionary adaptive processes in a given population.

However, adaptive processes often require a prolonged duration free from overstimulation. This will encourage change without irremediable consequences. Post-industrialized cultures, however, as a consequence of mechanization, were hard-pressed to afford a man the adequate period required for adaptation. Immediately, schizophrenia was regarded as a symptom of systemic dysfunction rather than an indicator of ongoing adaptive processes. As the schizophrenic was not deemed conducive to the overall efficiency of a mechanized culture, he was removed and replaced with laborers able to adapt to sudden change without consequence. That is, laborers characterized by psychological fixity deemed invaluable to the ends of the Industrial Revolution. It became the aim of industrial cultures to suppress the schizophrenic disposition and to favor those individuals in whom the “disorder” was apparently absent. Herein was conceived the proletariat—constant, well-adjusted, self-effacing, insoluble; a population born to serve the machine.

Marginalized was the individual whose sense of self was crippled by the inability to adapt to sudden, terrific change on cue; he was “unfit,” “ill,” “maladaptive,” and “weak,” when really he was guilty of complexity and dynamism. Which is to say, he required patience and tolerance as his mind assimilated novel sensory stimulation, converted it into intelligible data, and attempted to incorporate it into a fully adapted schema, able to cope with change and tumult with increasing effectiveness. For the schizophrenic, reflection and memory and reference are integral to evolutionary adaptive processes, where they are only minor functions of adaptive processes in the non-schizophrenic. If changes outpace the rate at which an individual may adapt, he is at risk of becoming not only outmoded by the social organism to which he belongs, but also altogether non-operational. That he does not change on cue, is no fault of his own.

Post-industrial, chip-based cultures possess similar but more insidious ingredients for despair. Today, our choices are even fewer, as are our opportunities for adaptation. In a post-industrial, chip-based culture, we no longer adapt; we conform...*or else*. And conformity must occur at an earlier and earlier age that it might effectively subsume any and all predispositions to schizophrenic and maladaptive states.

Creativity is the fruit of reflection, self-awareness, and consciousness. Reflection, self-awareness, and consciousness foster creativity when they are permitted, and they are permitted only in environments in which patience and tolerance are preconditions. It is no wonder, then, that man's capacity for reflection and self-awareness, and consequently, his creative faculties have been much diminished in post-industrial, chip-based cultures. Unoriginality is the result. Previously, we referred to the physiochemical changes that the brain undergoes in response to environmental change. We suggested that it was an adaptive evolutionary mechanism. Again, time is required for the proper and fluid operation of said mechanism. But as industrialized cultures increasingly refuse to afford man time in which to undergo adaptive change, adaptive change itself, in absence of catalytic environments and stimulus, is at risk of stopping altogether. The feedback loop about which we hinted—the projection of man's genius upon the world and the backflow of stimuli to the brain, whereupon adaptive change is affected—no longer has an incentive. This signals the death of the imagination.

Imagination → Imagination has been regarded by parametric cultures as unwieldy and dangerous, causing general unrest in both the individual and the population at large. And parametric cultures, those cultures determined by parameters, have gone out of their way to suppress the imagination. We may observe the overall, cumulative effect of social engineering upon creative endeavors today: the flow of the imagination from the artist's heart to his hands has been stanchied.

Herein I overtly address the writer, but not to the exclusion of other artists. It is my intention to address the imagination, and those that would employ the imagination in the service of *Vision*: it is the artist's responsibility to save man from himself.

× **040103MD**

APRIL FOOL'S DAY

Each day, in its own right,
Quite unlike the last;
In its singularity,

In the point that it would make,
Excusable in its innocence.

Each day, coming into its own,
As a candle that would burn
Because it has to,
Or as a flame that would remain
In spite of the wick.

Each of them,
Quite unaware of the last,
As a new generation of birds,
Or a hive of bees,
Determined...
Without accountability.

Each day,
Borne by the next,
Ever, yielding to the last;
Each, as an apple that would sooner fall late
Than be picked by chance.



On the 1st of May, Tom Shaw completed his so-called “decoction, decipherment and distillation of the life, times, loves and record of such by one Russell Huggins.” Shaw leaned back in Huggins’ desk chair, lit a cigarette and took a deep drag. The stoked ember lit the room momentarily. He crushed out the cigarette, sat in the dark. In a few minutes he would call Moffett or maybe he would wait until morning. Maybe he wouldn’t call at all. He could leave his notes where they lay, stacked in three cardboard boxes in the hallway. He could walk away and leave Button House. He could choose to spare Russell Huggins exposure and scrutiny at colder hands. What would Katie have done? What would Russell Huggins have wanted? Surely not this—*this invasion*.

Shaw was struck by a flash of emotion. It threatened to sweep him away. It choked him. He sobbed. Katie was a better person than he. She would call Moffett and tell him he had gotten a bad lead, there

⁵⁰ P - WYNN, “JOY.” BLISS HE ENJOYS WHO KNOWS NOT PAIN, SORROW NOR ANXIETY, AND HIMSELF HAS PROSPERITY AND BLISS AND A GOOD ENOUGH HOUSE. —OLD ENGLISH POEM

was nothing here—nothing worth compiling. It was all a mistake and Moffett could call off his dogs. She'd tell him that there was no evidence to indicate that Huggins had led a life of substance and intrigue. She'd tell him that the ledgers and journals were indecipherable, filled with nonsense and junk code—an exaggerated case of nonproductive hypergraphia.

Katie: she would have brought wisdom to this last chapter at Button House.

Shaw got up and flipped on the overhead light. He went to the wall and touched the photographs hanging there, one by one. He ran the tip of a finger over the faces of a young couple. They sat on a set of bleachers, holding red plastic cups. They were in their late twenties, were smiling. Behind them were visible Hanover Street Bridge and a sliver of the Patapsco River. Shaw removed the frame from the wall and then the photograph from the frame. On the back in neat print with round ascenders and rigid descenders was written:

Russell and Allayne, '98, Middle Branch

Huggins had not been ugly or a brute. He had not been distasteful, violent or disfigured. Granted, his work indicated an unusual life, but also a proud one, an intellectually dignified one, a life led with passion and fire. The photograph still in his hand, Shaw wandered in bare feet into the hallway, then to the landing. At the top of the stair stood the suitcase, shoes and wadded-up socks. In his head he could hear Katie's voice: *It was his time, Tom, like it was mine. He even packed. I might have packed, too, if I'd had the presence of mind. He was ready.*

Shaw knelt, unlatched the suitcase. It was empty, save for a single scrap of ruled paper. On it was scrawled:

We will tell you without telling you. We will show you and you may one day realize that the truth is represented by the less interesting of two objects...

Shaw held the scrap to his chest with one hand, punched a number into his cell with the other: "Moffett, it's Shaw—I'm finished."

×

“It’s a sorry life when an editor has the last word.”

—George Irwin

I agree.



OTHER WORKS

POETRY · APPENDICES · AFTERWORD

FOREWORD

This is for you. It must be.
You are the one for whom I write, your ears alone.
That you read this, understand, is enough.
I can rest now, knowing this,
Feeling that nothing is any longer lost,
Not so long as you live.

Here, a better man might stall,
Pack a bag lunch, go hunting for the right words,
But I don't have the time, never did.
We played in earnest and work now in earnest.
This isn't shorthand, so too, it can't be calligraphy.

It is an account,
Of a world to which I would return,
Were I able, and in a heartbeat.
And because you were interested,
We will go back together, passengers,
Pulled in a carriage through the breadth of my memories.
You are the reader for whom I have been looking
That makes it easy to recount and write.

WARDS THE MEN BY THE NEW GOD WERE MADE

The good poem aims to assure the reader
that there is something beyond the Word:

the Word confines.

We have become a people able only to see what we have
classified:

the things that we have named.

There is, however, a world — things — that cannot be named,
will not be named, should not be named ... *classified*;
a world betwixt and between.

It may be considered, sensed, even touched,
but a journey to the world betwixt
is not one from which you may return with tales.

Its flora and fauna are beyond the Word.

Once visited, one is changed evermore,
but the change will not be related: one's win is a loss.

A loss that will not be quantified —
a gutting, carving, chiseling:

 a dugout soul, a man remade ... not, any longer, in God's own
image ...

... out from under governance, steered no longer.

Language begins and the losses mount:

what is named is concealed,
wrapped, managed, packaged, made fit for consumption.

Once named, a thing BECOMES: *it is*.

We soon become overwhelmed
by all of the things that have been permitted,
by grace of words, to possess *IS*-ness,
and our perception narrows:

 we see only what is sanctioned — what ridges peak through
the cloud tops ...

... inured to the idea of the value of the Word.

In the blessedness of the Word
 we were made to believe;
 with the Word, light shone on the children of men –
 order entered the corporeal world.
 Symbols assumed names, were described, became legion, were
 shrunken:

the symbols were robbed of power; the totems felled.

A new enemy was named:

the implacable.

That which cannot be named must be expunged,
 cast out and away.
 Wards the men by the new God were made.
 And Native action was now accompanied by an unbidden
 companion:
 the descriptor ...
 with which all intention was thought to be made plain.

Intention *is* made plain.

A bridge was erected to mend a rented space, a tear ...
 between they who could see absent language
 and they who could not;
 between they who with gesture commanded
 and they who could but growl their way to satisfaction.

The Word is too much with us.

Reveal = *re-veil*.

Classify, or *to classify*, means *to withhold, as by censorship*.

The object of the Word is not withheld from us,
 though we treat language as if it were so;
 as if the object were other than it is: concealment ...

... and that concealment is the objective of the late-coming Gods on Earth.

AARON

Afoul of the inveterate sect,
 What fate befell the young remonstrant?
 By what fixed look was he captured?
 An example, he,
 That the bee still stings—
 And still strong the bite of excommunication;

That no window in the ghetto remains ajar...

Though he did not speak so,
 It must appear
 As though he spoke so,
 That vengeance might be,
 Accordingly
 Exacted, in the name, of the Law,
 On the Lamb, who windows opened,
 Who had Haman's ear.

What false gods
 At the sills hovered,
 Born of winter, in black mantles,
 With sticks pointing?
 And in pockets, in felt bags,
 Gavels wrought of almond wood...

What emissaries of Esther?
 What wanton will be pacified?
 What Legend satisfied?
 What queer justice ... exercised?

Tomorrow—

More Lambs, first-born Sons,
 By noose, by knave, by dagger, by Law...
 Nine remain: Nine sacrifices of two minds—
 To each offering its appointed season,
 And by lunar decree, no reward of refuge;
 No, too lenient were the elect,

Too strong their identification,

With the host!

The ten-minus-one.

For in too many small bones abided
A shearing weakness for the Hellene,

So marked were they by limps...

He and they, who in Cicero,

Did not...

Find an enemy.

THE OLD WORLD

This first Sunday evening in September
 Seems always to signal autumn.
 I would know these sun-flecked clouds anywhere,
 Roaming east with golden and grey underbellies—
 This leached blue sky, minutes before sunset.
 Tomorrow, everything will be different.

On the periphery of the beltway,
 Where the buildings began to shrink
 And the roads to narrow,
 There was an extension on evenings like this,
 As though a handful could be leased at a time,
 Then parceled out...

Tonight, an ebbing,
 Nature tipping its hand, showing me something,
 And I don't want to keep it for myself—
 I want this to be yours also.

I have been here before.
 I may not be here again—
 When the sun sets for the last time on the old world.
 Tomorrow, the face of things will be changed.

TOMORROW, A SOLDIER

Something ended tonight.

I want to stand beside a woman and her child.
I will never stand beside a woman and her child.
The woman is my beloved.
 The child is of me.

None of this is true.

I have been forsaken.
Soon, tomorrow, I will be a soldier
And gone will be the luxury of want.

There is no woman.
There is no child.
I am no longer.

There is light here, enough to see,
 But not enough for joy.

**THE BOOK BURNER,
THE SLEEPER
AND THE STALKING WOMB**

Between storms in a wooden chair in tall grass, your hair drying, wisps in the wind, I watch from within the circumference of willow roots, behind her braids. I won't approach over heaved ground, won't show hunger mercy. I'll sit among the rocks, atop weeping nettles, under dripping pine, beneath a clouded sky, upon the shore of the sand-bottomed frog-pond, in the company of roaming snapping-turtles, with calico Ivy in the ferns covered in blood. My thumb is swollen from sucking, and the flesh under my eyes is dark and raw.

Treetops moan in the west-wind, bend at their waists, rounding bodices filled with desperate whispers. A place of accumulated essences, distilled impressions, something nearby holding a leather leash, standing in the tall cedars, masked by dead limbs and brown, curling leaves; a Stalking Womb, a pitch father, all knuckles and elbows, a decaying shock-trooper out-of-time, wrestling with time, shaping disfigured Dresden orphans from the mud, striking them into life with a cane of birch.

The painted hedge tied with webs spun by pearl spiders ringing belt-like Book Burner's bleached-bone fortress, who perches under a vent with a furrowed brow, a cinch-scrunched nose, and untrimmed mustache, with an acetylene torch, warming bindings, loosening leaves of brittle-paged digests, I in worn-kneed corduroys on my segmented belly, inching into the yard through thistle-down,

the Stalking Womb in wool near but not near enough, never with sufficient mass to bend the property into a steep bowl with its own tantalizing horizon.

Under crab-apple tents, through the crooked hatchet-hewn trellis festooned with limp balloons, behind me, wreathed in blue smoke carried east on black wings, the wooden, tarpapered tower, and the Sleeper under gables. In my dreams, a blackbird carries in its obsidian beak the Sleeper's marble eyes to the silent rookery in the larches, east, where trees are caped and bonneted, picked clean of pearl spiders by pink-jacketed mantis'.

Over whittler's rinds, mineral-flecked earth, the leathery carcasses of worms, into the bald, beige, hard-packed dog run, railed by stalks of suspiring steel grass, past the stone Bolzoi with cloth haunches bedded in soft ash dimpled by raindrops, motionless under rose prickled lintels, Book Burner's sole companion, carved with a Cooper adz from felled trees reserved by God for aristocratic beasts.

The Bolzoi—the once elegant alarm—is lame; she won't stir in her ashes, or smell my chafed skin through long, striped sleeves, while the Sleeper, snug where once a bell hung, swaying in an unpadded cradle, pink gauze in her empty sockets, will plaint through cracked lips: "*Hurry*, the Stalking Womb is on the stair."

Book Burner, in the dusk of his rendering room, dim-witted, abloom nevertheless with the will to the mystical, a toe-hold on masterfulness, beating back with a rod carved

with symbols of dignified error the spiraling
 compasses, the barometers of conscience,
 self-possessed, who with a command of high
 illusion, who with special organs, who with
 intuition, exalts the Sleeper though the
 Stalking Womb perish.

And the Sleeper on whose behalf I belly-crawl
 with unconscious faith, for whom truth is not
 necessarily good, in any quantity, under all
 circumstances, if wisdom is not in earnest
 brought to bear on the living, while the
 mantis' chitter, carry the standards of folly, of
 fact, of hither and yon, against the claims of
 ascending value.

Mixing ash with mortar, Book Burner
 bricking up the lightless passages to a third
 kind of knowing, to hardy percepts designed
 to suborn the reasoning mind and the brittle-
 legged men, dwarfed by craft, rising in nearby
 locks, to inch down the still-watered canal,
 dead mules on the banks; inch west to crush
 what's left in the aggregate of vocation, to
 campaign against the Sleeper's verdicts, to
 sew doubt in the property once more; to try
 our Gods.

Under several seasons of willow branches,
 beneath the Bolzoi's curling nails, the rotting
 placard: *TEST, NOT TRUST*, and below the
 placard, one layer each of children, lye and
 fools.

BY HAND

Yes to long letters by hand—
Deliberate, desperate and at the mercy of hazard;

Yes to mornings that creek on rusty hinges,
And to eighth-notes with stainless steel spoons
On inherited, chipped and woeful china
At tenement-treaty tables.

OUR CHOSEN WEAPON

I'll find you a tree—
 An aged, moss-covered, cycloptic thing,
 No longer too self-assured;
 We'll meet for a day—or several—
 An afternoon like a woven basket,
 Threaded through the head of the forest's needle,
 Twined from branch to branch;
 A warp, a weft, sewn up
 Inside a bag filled with stolen hours.

Now a chasm this hair's-width
 Between my thumb and your cheek,
 Earlobe, tear-wetted hair—
 This driving from an unfurling knitted egg
 Into the reaches,
 To take you by the fingertips,
 Lead you over the rock wall,
 Pull you into roots...*down*.

And it won't be a long life,
 But it could be, if only briefly,
 A salvaged life—something dear.
 We could be forgiven,
 Absorbed into heartwood,
 Pumped through woody veins,
 Transmuted and breathed back into the sky,
 If you say 'yes.'

COUNTER-LUMINESCENCE

Sadness has its own velocity, its own equations describing acceleration along a vector, bent beyond the event horizon, pulled, spread, turned into cosmic batter, and you are the ineluctable observer, following in the turbulent wake of an arrow sailing on its projected path, clawing after its flaming nock, pulled toward the shimmering boundary, which once passed, is inescapable—a descent into super-density.



Our trajectory is toward the incandescent, toward interior light—simultaneously into and out of emissive fields—a world that is skin-prickling, constructive, propulsive—a world in which we are reciprocally inspired by one another, without a swallowing horizon, and wherein velocity is a function of our affections.

CHIASMA

The cat can still hear you,
Doesn't sleep, grows thinner, itchy.

The cat doesn't blink.
He crouches, watches,
His head pitched at a listening angle.
You are around the corner,
Behind a door, under the bed, in a drawer;
His are eyes grown wide with fever, with panic,
Rounded with marching symbols,
Afflictions for which he is a poor host;
You would take him with you, were you able—
Would take him in part or in whole—
Rob him first of his wits, then his equilibrium,
Leave him a perfect sentry
To the airless depression you left behind.

We lie on the well's dry pebble-bed,
He with tail swooshing, all haunches,
I with fingers laced behind my head,
Squinting into the rock shaft,
Embedded, as it were, in this hole's retina,
Weighted by a vitreous mass,
Preparing for a slow slide after a hard rain
Into the nervous system of this long, black night.

You left him, us,
Passed through the lens;
We watched you climb down
The chamber's axis in bare feet;
Watched you beg on the hem
Of our once and great blind-spot,
Our only refuge from fever—yours, the cat's, mine;
Watched you beg for admittance, into feeling,
On hands and knees over broken glass
Out of our lightless socket,
Into cleanliness.

The cat listens to the burrowing mites
Compete with your echo.
And it is just as well that we go unclaimed;
That we wait for these hatches to erupt from below,
To give, crumble...

EXLEY

I am sitting with your father, watching him take the revolver out of its box. The apartment is empty and the women are gone. Maybe he'll buy pipe-cleaners, clean the gun for the first time. You have to clean them, he thinks, once in awhile. Oil the cylinder, dust the chambers, and inspect the barrel. He doesn't clean it. He puts it back in the box, places the box onto the closet shelf. Another day, he thinks.

"I was a success," he says.

Success eats one up from the inside, an organ at a time—slow nibbles, then faster—or perhaps it is like glaciation, ice creeping across the extremities, exfoliating as it crawls, inches toward the center, roves over the core, one's temperature dropping in increments, year after year, until one is stiff and incapable of perspective, eyes turned to lolling, frosty marbles, hands like butcher-blocks and fingers like dead kitchen utensils.



Exley was crushed by his longing for success. It undid him. He drank prodigiously—perhaps heavier than any other man alive—grew fat, despicable, was preternaturally self-aware, knew how ugly he had become, how black his character; was institutionalized three, maybe four times, finally undertook the work that was his calling, wrote compulsively and one evening, drunk, burned it, his best work.

YOUNG ROGER, CANNONBALL

Desperate want, yearning,
And veins too close to the surface of the skin,
Pulsating, irregular, some broken from overexertion,
And the vessels in his eyes throbbing and arterial,
Climbing out from beneath the lids,
Like vines over boulders, grappling with black irises.

A desperate early offensive—
A cannonball in flight,
Arcing high over the castle walls,
Slathered in tar and burning, crackling,
The sky seared by its passage,
Finally crashing comet-like,
A giant plume of fire its signature.

1987

The leaves were always falling, turning and falling, or threatening to turn, or having fallen, quickly covered by snow, calling cards of the seasons stacked atop one another. Winter was insistent, always knocking, the almost-season, but we were most aflame in autumn, as boys and young men.



Mrs. W's car slowed beside me; I could hear the rubber tires sticking to the pavement, sucking on it, peeling away as they turned—the sound of the smell of sun-warmed and cracked sneaker-soles.

A motor whirred in the door-well and the driver-side window squeaked open. Next to Mrs. W, bolt-upright in the passenger seat with large white teeth, sat her son.

“This is Roger,” she said. “This is his first day.” Roger leapt out of the car.

Roger was short, was bow-legged and had kinky black hair screwed in knots to his head. He made me feel tall.

I could sense his nervous energy. His shirtfront rippled with each heartbeat. He hopped up and down in his Chuck Taylors, took long strides, sprang forward, doubled-back, clapped his hands. We watched his mother pull away, disappear around the bend.

Roger was panicking. He was a stranger, looking for an angle, a tutor, was ready to

take mental notes:

“What is it like, this new school? What about the girls? Which ones do you date? Which ones should I date? It’s fine. It’s fine.” Nothing would be fine, not ever.

We stood in mail-order clothes, my house looming behind us, the paint beginning to peel, the bricks from the front stoop crumbling, the driveway disintegrating.

We stood, sheltered by a Pin Oak. My mother, in her yellow bathrobe, waved from behind the panes of the living room window. I waved back. Roger did too.

“We should go,” he said.

Roger was in a crouch, hunched over like a runner on a starting-block, squinting into the fog at the end of the street, watching kids clot behind a crossing guard, her arms raised and her face expressionless:

“I’m color-blind,” he said, “Everything is brown. You’d tell me if it wasn’t, right?”

Everything was brown. I’d tell him if it wasn’t. Roger climbed out of his crouch, leaned close. His breath smelled like cereal and sour orange juice.

I looked back at the house. *We should go*, I thought. I peered at my Casio, watched the seconds pass.

“It’s getting late,” Roger commented.

I stepped off the sidewalk and onto the

grass, put my arms around the Pin Oak, kissed its rough bark. “Okay,” I said, “let’s go.” We went.

Into the fog, around the bend, and to school.



We passed into fog, were absorbed, heard disembodied voices, children giggling, feet scuffing on cement, no faces, that pale odorless smoke still too thick.

We were skiffs bobbing to shore, the sound of whooshing pant legs beside and behind us; pens, pencils, rulers and erasers, loose and colliding in backpack pockets.

It was too much, too soon. I grabbed Roger’s shoulder, tried to punch a hole through the fog with my fist, stabbed the air, pointed, said, “The woods. We could go to the woods instead, live there.”

“Yeah, yeah,” he responded, “we could.”

I squinted, could see the outlines of houses bulge, swell, and grow faint again. I felt unwell, dizzy, was prepared to step off the sidewalk, cross the street and leap over the wall that marched alongside the nearest bulge; I could follow the crushed-stone drainage ditch to the tunnels that passed through the heart of the hemlock hedgerow. I could move swiftly, like a platelet through sweet-smelling thatches to an open wound. I would be home in minutes.

I wasn’t moving. Roger grabbed my

shirtsleeve, tugged me forward, the hopeful reverie cracked. The skiffs built up behind a crossing-guard wearing an orange belt and tin badge, bunched at the too-narrow mouth of a swelling river.

“Where do we go?” Roger asked. “Which door? Where do we stand? Can we go in or do we wait?”

The Elementary School, built like a squat barracks, repelled the fog which formed a tight ring out of which we popped, the air different now, thinner, without texture or taste. Roger, eyes bulging, walked on the tips of his toes, “Which way?”

I led him around the perimeter of the traffic circle into which roared a column of school buses... I had ridden the buses before, on field trips—to pumpkin patches, cider houses, museums.

“I hope we have classes together,” Roger said, digging his hands into the waistband of his sweats like a cowboy.

We would not have classes together. I would see him on the way to school and after school, at lunch and on the playground, and between classes in the hallway as he was hauled by his collar to the principal’s office.

I would watch him from my seat, his heels dragging on the polished tile, flanked by two teachers, each gripping one arm, Roger glowering from under his dark, hooded eyes...*hell-bound*.

HOLY CROSS

Idling over rooftops,
 Clothes catching on lightning rods,
 Choking on ozone,
 Prancing on the gables...

This was the choice view,
 Kings over all that we surveyed,
 With confidence in a suspicion,
 That the fully pitiless life was the most noble;
 That we must espouse natural daring,
 Answer our impulses,
 Repress nothing.



We lived,
 Nine doors apart,
 And around a hairpin turn that we hung
 On bald-tired bikes,
 Scooters and later in cars,
 Sometimes borrowed,
 Always with siphoned gas.

A FITTING HOST

Already fifteen odd years ago—
 The races and accidents and fires.
 You wouldn't race unless our respective girlfriends
 Were strapped in, buckled in beside us,
 White-knuckling the dashboard.
 The fun, half of it for you, was sewing terror,
 Turning up the music until the windows shook,
 Until the stink of fear mixed with the too-strong smell
 Of Estée Lauder *Beautiful*.

The other half of the enterprise was preventive measures,
 Stop-gap solutions, keeping you tame, level,
 Like I was responsible;
 Putting out fires, *real ones*,
 And you holding a bottle of lighter-fluid to your chest,
 Eyes bloodshot, veins pulsating in your forehead,
 Smoking famously, cigarette after cigarette,
 And once blowing up a back-hoe,
 Massive, sitting on giant treads, encased in grease,
 Watching the flames lick the gas reservoir,
 I trying to smother the flames, hands on fire,
 You laughing, *always* laughing,
 Always antagonizing the Fates.

On your wedding day—
 Day of the formal wedding,
 Not the over-the-coffee-table-marriage
 Of the young lovers, but the church wedding,
 Months later—I was your best man,
 Wore borrowed clothes,
 A seersucker jacket of my father's;
 And that night, no honeymoon,
 But a trip to Muller Hill,
 Roaring through the woods in my Jeep
 To the infamous black patch,
 Not consecrated ground, but site of famed decapitations,
 And the well down which the heads were thrown.

We made camp
At the foundation of Muller Mansion,
Burned in 1912 by livid townsfolk,
Home of Louis Anthe Muller,
Believed to be Charles X in hiding,
From reign of terror to reign of terror,
Now host to newlyweds—a fitting host.

LOVE, COURTESY OF A SCARECROW

After the church service, minutes into the reception,
 A call from Roger; you can deny him nothing.
 Your new bride, senses piqued, eyes wide,
 Knows that you are leaving; that you will embarrass her,
 Slip out before the first dance, before the cake,
 For one last hurrah—overdue, you think—
 This last favor to Roger; to the scarecrow in jeans.

You ached for something decent, found it; it was dear.
 But you would steal one last car—
 Something complicated for old time's sake,
 Be back in time for apologies;
 Back to dance with the bride's mother,
 To rub her father's shoulders, toast his pride, but after...

Yes, *after*.

You prepare for reproofs, excuse yourself,
 Reach for and kiss her hand.
 Roger is at the edge of the yard, a boot on the wall.
 You see him through tent-poles. She does, too.
 Roger's eyes twinkle but he doesn't smile.
 He has a car in mind—three blocks north. You could walk.

You didn't want to lead the kind of life
 For which you would need to make apologies.
 Not anymore.
 But there would be one last apology, had to be.
 Roger would see to it.

You didn't talk.
 He sized you up in the tuxedo, seemed satisfied:

"Last things..." he started.

It wasn't a sentence—a statement—that he would finish.

"Looks like rain," you say.

It did, would,
 And later you would hold her fast,
 The rain untying her hair,
 Flattening her dress, filling your shoes;
 And with cheeks pressed, floating over flagstones,
 A first dance, a last dance...
 There would be no humor in it—couldn't be;
 It was a desperate marriage, a clutching marriage,
 Something on which your very survival depended:
 Collision or suicide...

Roger was giddy, twitching, walked briskly.
 He smacked his leg with a rolled up copy
 Of the Philadelphia Enquirer.
 You weren't three blocks from the reception.
 You could hear the wedding band warm up.

"Simple," he said, and pointed at a late-model sports sedan—
 Keyless entry—hitched to the curb.

"Simple," you repeat. It was impossible.

The muzzle of a baby collie
 Appeared in the passenger-side window.

"For you," he said, "And her."

You will not see Roger again.
 You walk the block and a half back to the reception,
 A dog in your arms.

OUROBOROS

Words are ballast. I am the captain.
 On this ship, I can be as unruly as I wish.
 But I'll take you on, usher you up the
 gangway, call you my first-mate, but
 we are interchangeable:

You'll take the helm and I'll climb down
 into the bowels of the ship, hunt rats with
 spears.



Instead of driving, I walked overland on
 country-roads, away from town, through
 wild apple-orchards—shriveled fruit on
 naked branches.

I started out early, just after sunrise,
 nothing in my stomach, kicked over
 pastures and descended the brambled hill
 to King Settlement Road, began the last
 leg, the long trudge, passed under the
 blinking light at Woods Corners and into
 the City Limits, was forced off the road by
 school buses, tractor trailers, into
 garbage-filled culverts, choked always with
 the husks of dead deer and desiccated
 cats.



I resented death, *Thanatos*, and vowed one
 day to have his head on the end of a stick.
 The dead I have known better than the
 living, and at its caped personification I
 sneer, spit.

My chief concern was age-appropriate
 death—retrieving fat old women from the
 emergency room, dead from massive heart

attacks, leaking from every orifice,
 transferring their impossible weight onto
 stainless steel gurneys, slamming them
 always with fury in my heart into the back
 end of a hearse, ferrying their stinking
 shells to the embalming room.

Age-appropriate death, although I still
 resented it, as well as the ceremony that
 attended it, I was able to accept, but not
 the teenagers wrapped around telephone
 poles, or the crib-deaths. Especially not the
 crib-deaths: baby caskets, purple lips,
 makeup on faces that should not have
 makeup—barely-lived lives—wailing souls,
 bereft parents, and I standing nearby.

Was I slouching? Did I look bereft? Did
 they know that I wasn't sad, but angry?

Babies, dead in December, stored in felted
 caskets in the chapel basement until
 spring, when the embalmer hefted the
 casket off its dusty shelf, unsealed it,
 inspected his handiwork.

Were there mushrooms blooming on the
 faces of the dead? Did they leak, split a
 seam? Was there cauliflower growing in
 their ears, moss on their fingertips?

Yes. Sometimes. Often.

Spring burials: retrieving the dead, their
 caskets for yet another service, sermon,
 speech, final rest; retrieving the dead
 when the ground was soft, buds bulging on
 still-naked limbs from the cold crypt in
 which breath hangs in the air.

There was no rest, not for the dead. Nature was always at work, taking bodies back, in pieces, even while in casket-repose—bodies leaking, an inch of blood on the floor—stepping over it, through it, tracking bloody footsteps down the chapel steps.



Alone behind the wheel of the hearse with Ramirez in garbage bags, dozens of garbage bags—bags within bags—arms, organs, legs, most of a head. Ramirez in pieces after falling off the seat of his tractor, chewed up by a combine. Alone with Ramirez, the windows down, the stink overwhelming, racing through red lights, exceeding all posted speed limits, the radio blaring, but I could still hear Ramirez. He didn't want a funeral. He didn't want to be mourned.

The hearse squealed around corners, screeched to a halt at the crematorium. I unpacked the bags filled with Ramirez onto a gurney. One last trip for Ramirez. Not on a tractor.



“You must see the new furnace,” Ransom shouted. He gripped my arm, pulled me into the crematorium, already ablaze, tile scintillating, warm pockets of air rotating, turning, dancing out the door, disembodied spirits, stealing into daylight.

“Kneel here,” he said, at what was effectively an altar, a platform positioned before the cherry-red furnace—*dust-to-dust*.

A hatch opened, my tie flew over my shoulder, a scorching gust billowed my shirt, and the whites of my eyes turned to crackled china.

Inside, jets of fire, and every bone of a charred skeleton rattling, slaked of flesh, brittle fingers playing an invisible piano, geysers of liquid light spurting through the chest cavity, a bonfire behind the skull's sutures.

Light, hollow bones, the marrow vaporized, that do not burn, placed in a bone-grinder—a stainless steel mixing bowl with a hand-crank.

“Try it,” Ransom encouraged me. I did, humored him, the quiet rage building.



The dead—commemorating the dead—buried sometimes in liquor bottles...

Graveside, loitering on cold headstones or sun-baked monuments, watching dozens of shoes shifting uneasily at the lip of a grave, sometimes reading a book, or Shakespeare's Sonnets, something stowed in a pocket, something inappropriate, intransigent, sticking it to Thanatos, sticking it to God.

Dead children, dead friends, working dead friend's funerals... Bobby, dead of an aneurysm, young, his mother:

“It must be hard for you,” she said. I was slouched in the hearse, my head lolling. What did she mean? Because I had seen

him in the embalming room, wearing
 makeup, naked, barely a man—a boy next
 to whom I had sat in class, joked.

Friday: he sat with his head on the desk,
 did not speak. Thanatos was there, looming,
 his scaled tail swooshing. I had felt it. Bobby
 died on Saturday afternoon, while playing tag.



The funeral home had a cupola, a place to
 which I had already made blood offerings,
 and there I would hide, write furiously, fill
 ledgers, front to back, not quite on the
 edge, still ready to love fully, become
 something else—a husband and father;
 the hammer had not yet connected with the
 glass.

I wrote. It was open battle. I waged war
 and with resentment I fueled the fire.
 There is no joy that cannot be subverted,
 cut open, let out to dry, beaten and
 tanned, turned into something fashionable,
 wearable, pathetic. It is a circle, and
 Thanatos has a pet, something on a short
 leash:

Ouroboros.

NAVIGATION

Navigation, or is it vibration?

Are we mixed, poured, and shoveled into place—

Irregular heaps, clumps, like thick cement—

Lain into moulds, irregularities vibrated out of the forms,

Sealed with polyethylene, left alone, *cured*, then used?

Is it navigation, or a disassembly,

An expansion, reformation,

And then reunification, hardening?

Is it a shaping from without or a turning from within,

A tuning, a response to like-frequencies,

A reordering of cells into ranks and files, columns?

THE INVASION

There is an orchestrated bludgeoning.
Who survives or escapes the pogrom unscathed,
Sneaks down the unguarded alleys,
Charms the men in jackboots, slips into the country?
If you are beaten by nightsticks in the town square,
Cannot get free, are shackled, then finally
You will be reduced in capacity, made irretrievable.
Then games become the measure or totality—*the sum*.

There has been an invasion, stealthy and successful—
A replacement or usurpation.
Vast numbers have been coaxed into the forest,
Beguiled, neutered, and sent back.
Something sinister is at work in the world.
It programs through the mechanism of trauma.

We downplay trauma—the little, cumulative
Traumas stacked atop one another, and the big
Ones, lined up like wrecks in an automotive
Graveyard.

WHEAT

There was light and life but there was also a tunnel. We couldn't get off the train—we barreled forward, the whistle blowing, smoke pouring from the engine.



The locomotive passes through a series of tall ranges—marble ranges and granite ranges—black tubes punched through the rock. Overhead loom jagged peaks—peaks gouging clouds. And when the marching avalanches of rock end, the tunnels will end:

The tunnels end at a roaring falls through which the locomotive splashes, dives—an iron caterpillar—wheels turning in the air, valves spitting, pistons billowing steam...

Through the air flies the engine, the ancient passenger cars, the sun-faded caboose. Window shades pop open and wide-eyed passengers peer out. Their skin prickles with goose bumps. Their hair stands on end.

The locomotive sails over the last outcropping of rock, the thin air whistling through the compartments. The locomotive dives and the cars behind it, and in the tilted aisles of the cabins roll lipstick tubes and soda cans. A teddy bear spins end over end... Children squeal.

No one speaks.

Closer to the blurry ground now, the air thicker, sweeter, you brace for impact, imagine the train burrowing nose-first into

the earth, the passenger cars collapsing
like an accordion...

But your ears begin to pop, the train to
slow. You are able to pick out detail in the
scenery—stalks of wheat? Are the fine lines
roads?

Still no one speaks. No one breathes—
nobody has breathed since crashing
through the falls, since leaving the rails...

The ground rises quickly to the train, will
soon grab it by the wheels, and then there
is light—peels of light. Something
enormous must have been broken,
shattered, split open to unleash such an
overwhelming light. The passenger cars are
engulfed, dazzled. The passengers squint,
cover their eyes.

So bright is the light that your body is
transparent. Through your skin you can
see your bones, their sinew-wrapped
hinges, and in your chest, through your
blouse, you can see your heart beat, fast
as a bird's.

The car begins to rumble...

“This is it,” you think. A low vibration
creeps through the car's joints. Welds
crack and bolts are shaken loose, window
glass turns to sand and spills to the floor.
You are light. You are the rumble. You
have been consumed. You do not feel fear.

No one screams.

It is quiet. The light softens. The rumbling

stops. You stare at your hands and hold them in front of your face. No longer transparent, they cloud, fill again from the edges with substance. The bones once more are concealed by flesh. The other passengers begin to murmur and then talk excitedly. You hear giggles, running feet, gasps, hoots of joy, and hands drumming on knees.

You turn and look through a window casement through which a soft breeze blows and you *see...*

The train has come to rest in a vast field of purple, flowering wheat. Spokes of light fracture the sky and drip honey-colored baby suns which burst and release golden streamers that race to the horizon.

Outside—his striped hat barely visible above the tall wheat—is the conductor. You remember that it was he, many years ago, that met you on the platform, punched your ticket and helped you onto an empty passenger car.

You rise from your seat. Other passengers are filing to the exits, stepping into wheat. You follow them. The conductor is there to meet you. He looks older, but the smile is the same. He holds your elbow. You step off the car, into space, peer one last time over your shoulder at the conductor.

He winks at you. You knew he would.

WHEN THE CAT WAS GOOD

I went for a walk in the country,
Through the woods and into the cemetery—
Wove among the headstones.

A narrow, wooded lane
Led from the cemetery to the house—
A long lane that extended without contours
To a blurry point—and on it I spied the cat,
Strolling in contemplation like a little man, tail swinging.
I ducked behind a headstone, watched.

My heart swelled with pride: he looked acclimated.
I wanted to feel that, too.

AUGUST

A tangle of hardy vines on the deck,
Wrapped in corkscrew spirals around the railing spindles;
I tried desperately to unwind them, gently, affectionately,
That no real harm would visit them,
And barring that, prune gently, selectively.
And as I worked, I recalled your touch,
Relaxed, ran my fingers over the waxen leaves,
Clipped and snipped with renewed industry.

TOTEM

There was a robin
Who spent weeks in a window,
Perched on a sill, then on a trellis,
Swooping into the windows,
And I was sure it was you,
A piece of you, trying to get to me.

And she was bold and unafraid,
And I was able to stand outdoors with her,
And she stood her ground, proud and purposeful.

For weeks,
She was the only robin in the yard.

SOLDIERS IN THE STREET

You and I met in a post-war diner.
 There was a matter of great urgency.
 We were the only customers.

Something was happening in the world—
some great tumult—and it was weighing
 upon us.

We were unable to speak freely—eyes and
 ears everywhere. Coffee cups and spoons
 sat untouched. I reached across the table
 for your hand. You were about to grasp my
 fingers, hesitated.

I had known the diner well, in another
 dream, in another life, when the world was
 different, before the war. Tables packed
 with children, babies in high-chairs,
 teenagers at the counter guzzling
 milkshakes, and a couple on their first
 date, the sun setting on their uneaten
 dinner.

That was the old world and we were in the
 new, with a dusk curfew, with soldiers in
 the street, with empty swings.

You said nothing and didn't have to.
 Your halo shown and your skin glowed:
 you were pregnant.

You began to cry, rose, exited the diner
 and stood on the stone stair, leaned on an
 iron railing.

Everything was awash in pink, the sky was
 vermilion. A soldier stood on the corner,
 rigid like a lamppost, a rifle in his arms.

I wanted to draw you close, cup your face
in my hands, kiss your lips, nose, and
cheeks, and assure you that everything
would be alright, but in the new world,
men and women weren't to touch, to hold
hands, to stroll together.

"I'll leave first," you said, and I watched
you disappear around the corner.

I listened to your fading footfalls, counted,
and followed...twenty paces behind.

It was the law.

COALESCENCE

I would like to build you your own nest out of found items—gleaned items—well-worn fabrics, swatches of colorful cloth, printed pillowcases, a layer of duck down, another layer of freshly picked cotton, then summer hay and loose satin.

It would be an oblong bowl-shaped nest scaled for two, with high scalloped walls and a rounded lip hung with Kelly Green bunting:

A nest, a warm lung, a heated cavity, legs in knots, a place without worries.

You would be held fast and tight, our bodies crisscrossed with thin bands of thready light filtered through tightly-woven walls and sunken portholes made of bottle-glass.

It will be a living nest with its own heartbeat, a pulse, nervous system, respiration—our bodies in the eye of an incandescent wooden whorl.

LETTER FROM BROADBOARD

A simple life—a garden, garden path, fireplace, a thick rug on which to lie at night, reading; a typewriter under a window with little square panes—a mullioned window, draughty—something that still permits the outside in, in all seasons.

We sit on our knees, splay out on the floor before us the artifacts of an afternoon—moss-covered twigs, round stones, mushrooms. We will give each a name, or they will tell us their names, and they will be categorized by vibration, set on a sill, or on shelves crowded with more evidence of our forest hauntings.

There are no topics that are denied. Hard and soft things are entertained together, considered, mulled over, read and said aloud.

The simple life denotes a world in which ideas move freely and easily, where we are validated:

The dog is validated, the chipmunk is validated, our pressing thoughts...*validated*.

I will honor your arguments, and you will honor mine—we will wrestle for understanding.

And there will be an estate called Broadboard and a cottage named Tolerance, and islands and stepping stones between the islands over which we will

move at night, carrying lanterns, reciting
verse, singing aloud; and later, dancing
barefoot on raw-wood floors, candles
burning.

Broadboard should be a right, absent
conditions. It should not be the place to
which we move after the war, with broken
hearts and rattled nerves, but when we are
fresh, excited and excitable; a place where
you can type, stack pages weighted with
river rocks; a place with a village nearby
with people that carve, whittle, blow glass,
tinker, and share.

RUNMARÖ

On the archipelago, late summer, the sun setting and the sky pink, you picked flowers on the lane by the shore and they lie beside us.

Somewhere nearby, children shriek and gallop in the washed out evening over tall grass, under low limbs.

“In the morning,” you whisper while the pink sky turns purple, “a boat ride with Ake.”

Around the bend, a motor cuts out. I imagine the boat bumping to rest against a warped dock, secured with rope. There it will sit, alone, for the night, until morning, when birds alight on its bow.

You point into the water, ten meters out, say you and the Larsson brothers had a contest—who could touch the bottom first. You won, came up holding a fistful of mud.

Runmarö—a world in which one can win, repeatedly, simply, and be rewarded with hugs, storytelling, crackling fires.

“I don’t feel claustrophobia here,” you say. “The houses only look small. Inside, when the families come home, they are enormous, room for everyone and everything!”

“Let’s walk in the dark,” you say. We do, listening to the crunch of our feet on the gravel.

“Even when it rains on Runmarö, it is nice,”
you explain. You tilt your head upward and
pretend to catch raindrops on your tongue.

TRANSTRÖMER IN THE MORNING

Klanger Och Spår, 1966—
Tranströmer was 35.

That there was such a man...
That such a man still lives...
Writing from Västerås or from his work cottage,
Worried about the limits of expression
But constrained by none—

Not in 1966.
Not thirty years later.

Is he alone,
Or are there children, grand-children,
Running wild on Runmarö?
Of course, a man like that, there are children,
A doting wife, a co-conspirator—
Able, high-functioning, leading two lives,
Dutiful in a way that I cannot be.

ABKHAZIA

I have been kicking around
An abandoned train station,
The railroad ties warped and overgrown.
The station's marble floor
Has been heaved with gnarled roots
And ancient pigeons nest in the eaves,
Cooing night and day.

I read by pale light
That slips through the vines
That choke the skylights,
And cook at night
In a crater left by a long-ago bomb.

And you, with hair whipped by the wind,
Come stepping, tie after broken tie,
Down the visible length of track toward the station.

THE DITHERING

On Tuesday evening, on death row,
A guard whispers into your cell,

“Tomorrow, early, before dawn, be dressed. You’re getting out.”

You sleep easily for the first time in weeks.
You clutch a smuggled letter in the dark—
Knowledge that behind the high, colorless walls,
Beating hearts, one of which cherishes something in you.

Is it true?

Tomorrow,
Will you pass through
The venous membrane of despair,
Drop jelly-covered onto an empty beach,
Find an outcropping on which to perch,
Let sea-foam stick to your shins?



I lie awake,
Imagine you hurtling
Through the underground
On a train to nowhere,
The car bucking on its rigid rails...
You read aloud from a coverless book,
Lick the tip of your pointer finger,
Prepare to turn the page, finish the sentence,
But so loud is the car that I struggle to hear you—
Your words, voice... I watch your lips,
Know how carefully you enunciate...each...word.
So loud is the car, so constant—
Iron kissing and rolling over iron—
That all errors, quanta, are sifted out of the equation,
Removed from the sticky machinery in our heads.

This storm has no eye.

And we don't look for it, need it—a center—
And agree to tumble, hands locked against the ropes,
The peripheral bands circling the storm.

We are extruded,
Soon exceed the speed of sound, leave a vapor-trail,
Particles of light scoring the firmament,
Headlong for convergence.



There is snoring on death row.
The guard rustles you awake, places a finger to his lips.
You slept in your clothes. You don't need to dress.

“Carry your shoes,” he says. “You are free.”

GARGOYLES

I would not go back, were our fingers not laced together in this way, if I could not feel our shoulders touch and smell your hair.

We can watch from here, just inside the door, still standing on hardwood, the braided rug at our toes.

Light approaches, is bent at ninety-degree angles at the windows, is refracted back into space.

You want to know what I am doing, sitting alone on my bed in the gloom imposed by burlap curtains.

“I’m picking a hole through my scalp,” I whisper.

I dug a hole in the top of my head with my fingers, can still see the dried blood under my nails, feel the warm rivulets run through my hair, drip on the collar of my shirt, stain.

Were we to stay here, we would soon witness a violent thunderstorm. We could part the curtains, watch thunderheads rotate in a holding-pattern over West Hill.

We could, but we won’t.

RESPIRATION

I visualize a wooden rowboat:

You sit in the bow.

I row,
 Only the sound of the oars,
 Dipping,
 pushing,
 dripping.

We navigate narrow, walled canals
 And pass under low, stone archways,
 Our passage lit by starlight.
 Here and there a shuttered window
 Out of which streams pale light—
 Searchlights with broken mirrors.

You look at me over your shoulder.

“I like to row,” I say.

You lean back over the bow,
 Crease the water with your hand—a little rudder—
 And begin to hum.

“They can’t hurt us,” I say.

“No,” you agree.

THE PRISM FILLED WITH ORPHANS

We have boarded a large craft.
 It has broad wings and was built to sail at high-altitude.
 The air is thinner, colder, but we are bundled in furs.
 We are warm.

We roll like a bead of mercury
 In an unperturbed layer between the stratosphere
 And mesosphere, starlight visible,
 Meteors raining down, vaporizing overhead.
 We can hear them whistle, crackle—interstellar artillery.

Skimming the tallest cloud-stacks,
 Purple and pink sprites fracture the earth's shell.



You and I, children now,
 Huddled on the living room floor on Broadway,
 The record player skipping.
 The building has been evacuated.
 You clutch a telegram from Brel:

One boat left. Stop. Will wait at port in Amsterdam. Stop.

“We won’t make it in time,” I worry.

The room is in the throes of a spasm,
 One wall cracking as the earth rolls
 Like an unfurling sheet of metal.

“We will,” you counter.



There is one boat left.
 We will row throughout the night, in pitch black—
 Row blindfolded under a starless sky
 Until the hull scrapes to a stop on a stony beach;
 A beach where things accrete,

Gather, are raised up overhead;
Where hearts are offered up, accepted, returned,
Thumping with new life—inverted sacrifices;
No longer a world in which our affections
Are decanted, soaked up, lost;

A world that is a prism
That does not consume, dissolve, digest and excrete,
But collects, refracts, multiplies and returns.

THE BALLAD OF JENNIFER JONES
...IN TWO ACTS

I. Local Skeletons

I was once in love;
 he is not dead.
 I love him still;
 he does not know.
 He thinks I have married—
 changed my name.
 It isn't true.

My grandmother,
 When she was in possession of her faculties,
 When she was spry, when she was sharp, met him.
 I brought him home—his dear, white face.
 And she cringed, said there was something wrong
 With me, with him, with his skin.
 And there was—something wrong: *I loved him.*
 He was easy to love, but often remote,
 Inaccessible, far away, detached.
 So I loved him harder, but knew our timing was bad.
 He would watch my sister rot and die;
 He would watch my grandmother grow old,
 Senile and unbearable.

He would disappear inside of himself;
 Traipse down the railroad tracks and into the country.
 He would hole up in his apartment,
 Write furiously, lose weight, eat stale bread.
 I would cook for him, try to fatten him up,
 Hold him as sirens split the night into uniform pieces.
 He seemed not to notice, as his ears had grown worse.

He feigned sanity. I did, too.
 We lay in bed, pads in our laps,
 Sketching, signing our names:

“You have hard left descenders,” he said.

I loved him in those rooms.
 I loved him when his back was bent over the desk,
 Fingers clacking on the keyboard,
 The monitor painting his face blue.

When there was a sense of fixity,
 However brief, when he was here to stay,
 “For a spell,” as grandmother used to say...
 When he was sane, when he held my face in his hands,
 Felt my cheekbones with his thumbs,
 We would browse the bookstores and record shops,
 Kick stones, play catch in the empty lots,
 Make love in the tall grass by the river.

When we were good,
 When forever entered into his mind—
 Stuck like a feather on a thorn—
 We would drive to the Eastern Shore in my brother’s Jeep,
 The top off, his hand on my knee...
 He looked confident, brazen and ready to be strummed.
 I would strum him.
 We would lie on the beach, sinking in sand,
 And I would coax song from him.
 His smile would reveal his intentions.
 He would stay, love me, start a family,
 And build an empire.

“He has fish to fry,” my sister said.

He would leave, roam,
 A hot longing growing in his heart—
 A longing tempered by pride.
 He would lose me and I him.

There would come a time
 When he’d try to find me, when he’d want me back,
 When the restlessness in his heart had subsided,
 But I would stay hidden,
 Buried under a heap of local skeletons,

Maybe sick like my sister, in spite of love—to spite love.

II. Frailty

This is how it begins—
 The emptiness, the poor spelling, the despondence,
 The feeling frail, sluggish, with enlarged organs;
 The inability to make phone calls or take phone calls,
 The turning over of books in tired hands;
 The kneeling on bruised knees
 On hard wood in supplication
 Before the dirty window with a mildewed shade.
 I should drink more water and less coffee.
 I should be inside by 2:00 a.m.,
 Pretending to sleep under sweat-soaked sheets,
 Balling my fists, feeling my fingernails loosen, bleed.

The wallpaper is peeling.
 My grandmother snores behind the thin wall.
 She will die soon. I hope she dies soon.
 She is a miserable old bag—toothless and reeking.
 I whisper to her through the wall, hope she hears,
 Goes mad, her old bones trembling, her marrow freezing.

I am exhausted, thin—
 Thinner than my sick sister.
 We spent the evening at the diner,
 Picking at pie with badly bent spoons.

She said, “Eventually we will have a last piece of pie together. But we might not guess it’s the last piece of pie, not until afterward, and then that might ruin pie for you, or at least Banana Crème pie. We should eat only pie that we do not like.”

She is dying—dying from dying,
artfully.
 Her friends—*my friends*—have died.
 They do not get obituaries.
 They die silent deaths, have quiet funerals,

No guests, no services, no headstones.

The dead are mummified,
Wrapped in their bed-sheets, stuck in trunks,
Or left in bed—usually left in bed.
I know houses in which skeletons have lain untouched
For years in cackling repose.
I will bury my sister and I will deliver a eulogy.
It will be enough.
It has to be.

JENNIFER JONES:
“NO GRAND CODA, THIS...”

...book—

About the world he left behind,
Dead friends, his secret lives, his pain,
The men that would have his soul if permitted;
A soul they started to nibble on;
He was their appetizer.
He wrote of them, sometimes affectionately.
He did not denigrate his demons.
He forgave them their sins.

I read by the light of street lamps,
And at the diner, my sister beside me,
Her head resting against the cold window.
She smoked and hummed to herself.
This was his diner, where he held court,
Plotted, rested, screamed.

I read...

It was cold—
Something from the root cellar with a bad seal.
He wanted to draw me out of the shadows.

I stay buried.

He has not found me yet.
He hasn't come in the night,
Calling from the street,
Standing on the grim curb,
Pelting the window with small stones.

ONE NIGHT STAND

Autumn:

It arrives quickly, takes things, doesn't apologize,
Leaves heartache—rekindled love, then lost again.
You sleep and it undergoes changes, doesn't rest,
Is already putting on tomorrow's dress,
Trying out a new hairstyle.

When you wake, her bags are by the door,
But she is still hungry, wants you to make breakfast,
A farewell feast.

You'll pretend to have an appetite,
A weak smile on your face as she moans into her eggs.

Even so, sitting here, eating an omelet,
The trees on fire, I can forgive her everything.
She can take it all.

AZAZEL, “THE SENDER AWAY”

If the author entered into a pact in Iowa, her work sealed with a secret kiss; if she has agreed to be polite, spare, efficient and understated; if she pretends to be angry, she will go to press.



I heard whispers:

“We protect our own.”

They meant:

*“We pass a corpse back and forth—
a travelling corpse.”*

Every last thought, *desiccated*, and the overriding question:

“How do we animate this thing?”

I KILLED THE FOUNDER OF CLAY

It is late.
 I feel a change, subtle—
 A shedding, not unlike previous moltings:
 Skin drying, curling, peeling, flaking,
 Popping off in corkscrew shapes like old rinds.

Is it an unmasking,
 Or a revealing—curtains drawn apart,
 A cast standing in the dark,
 Not speaking, faces in shadow?

It is a haunting,
 Rooms crowded with the dead,
 Bunched together, not good playmates,
 Would-be actors, answering an ad for a casting-call.

We do not sleep,
 But the machine sleeps.
 Its cells sleep.
 The grand exhibit sleeps!
 Rock, artifacts, still arrows, dry quills, brittle canvases...
 We understand nothing, make nothing new.

We carry knives—
 Slim, ivory-handled blades;
 We creep through the angular night,
 Stabbing at shadows, forcing Fate's hand,
 Hoping she'll answer our violence with a little of her own.

The September boughs bend,
 Don't break, are yielding, forgiving, flexible.
 This is a month, season, mistress,
 Through the sturdy limbs of which we can climb,
 Find high branches with commanding views;
 She has been slipped under our flesh like a nagging sliver,
 Has become embedded and accepted, not rejected.
 She has worked her way through our fascia,
 Bored through muscle, settled in our bones,

Made carvings there...

The spirit lives.
Her body is dead.

You understand,
when I say,
in a dream,
last night,
I murdered Jose Garcia Villa,
carved a comma,
on his chest.

THE GLEANER

Ginsberg stalked the Lower East Side at night,
Let commas sift through holes in his pockets,
Fall at his feet, abandoned.

Jose Garcia Villa picked them up,
Said they shouldn't go to waste.

He was a gleaner.

BRIGHTER, SWEETER

Morning again—a recurring dream: I was shot in the back, this time while exiting Victory Markets, a grocery on North Broad.

I had been shaking hands, lots of hands, re-familiarizing myself with the layout of the store—the meat-cutters, floor-walkers, cashiers. They reached out and touched me as I roamed from one aisle to the next, the lights bright, extinguishing all shadows...; they reached out, took my hand, clapped my back, “What was your name?”

I told them.

“We’ve met, haven’t we? I’m sure we’ve met before.”

Yes, *before*.

I took a last lap around the store, squeezed plums, patted hard orange peels, the air yeasty as I passed the bakery. At the front of the store, near the windows, it was cold and I was glad that I had worn a winter jacket. It had a fur collar, turned up. The jacket felt borrowed or had been a gift. I’m not sure which. It was warm and it fit well.

All dressed alike, a group of young men, twitchy, huddled by the sliding door, watched customers come and go, scanning each head-to-toe. Their hands were buried in their pockets. One, short and bald, stepped in my path, said, “Look where you’re going!”

Sorry, I said, kept moving—through the sliding door, into the parking lot, the sunlight harsh, walking quickly, almost to Mitchell Street. I heard

running feet. Someone shouted, “Hey!” I looked over my shoulder, watched the short bald kid pull a dented nickel revolver from his pocket, *fire*.

I knew the bullet had passed through the jacket, become a part of me. I knew the jacket had been changed somehow, was different. *Was I different?*

I was on my knees, then on all fours, the sunlight brighter, sweeter. I knew it would feel good to lie down. I was also thankful that there was no pain. I knew it would end this way, but I thought there would be pain, more blood and regret. I lay with my cheek pressed against the cold asphalt, my right eye blurry but my left still working well.

A minute more, I thought, just one more minute.

Although not breathing, I wasn’t distressed. The view was good. Mitchell Street looked good. Cars rolled in and out of a service station, their chrome parts sparkling. A Firestone sign lay on its side, attacked by weeds, snug in a bank of last year’s leaves. I felt gratitude, wondered if there was time to thank someone...for this.

My left eye grew blurry.

IT WENT UP IN FLAMES

The dog house went up in flames, the one the neighbor's kid lit, the kid with the harelip, with parents that wanted it fixed, but there was no money, wouldn't be they said, not until grandpa died, then there would be money, maybe a lot.

There was no dog, not anymore, so the doghouse didn't matter; it would go back to the earth faster. I sat in my bedroom window, watched the half-naked boy run around the tower of fire like an Indian. I was his friend and I would forgive him. He knew it.

That other relationships were not, could not be, so easy, was distressing. I said so once to the kid while he scraped away flaking paint on the garage door, said it aloud, figured it would go over his head, like the harelip implied feebleness.

"I agree," he said, still scraping. "I won't have time to paint this thing, not before school starts, but on weekends, when I'm not playing." I gave him an advance that day, said not to spend it all in one place, or on women and cigarettes.

Several weeks prior, the kid's summer break about to begin, I offered his parents help with expenses, should they decide to go ahead with the operation, but no operation had been scheduled or consultations. The grandfather would die soon enough, it wasn't cancer, grave, but soon, so no worries. He was a strong kid and could handle it and would I like another cup of coffee?

There was a girl across the street, I explained, and the kid liked her, could see her from his bedroom window, playing in the yard, drawing with chalk in the driveway. Could they hear me? They

couldn't hear me.

Yes, yes, we know her, her folks, were here when they moved in, when she was born, everything.

He really likes her, I said. He did, came into the garage in tears, sat on my lap, put his hand over mine, as I swung at nails with a hammer. He didn't need to say a word.

I wasn't a husband anymore. I missed that, learned I had been made for it, with her at least, her small extended family, my smaller one, animals—cats, a dog. We had a good run and I was able to feel human, cook, chop wood, build fires in the hearth, eat her food. I told her it was simple, that I could love or write, probably not both. Which do you want? I told her I wanted to love her, would do something else as long as we were healthy, make a home. Okay, she said.

Man and his tools, I commented to the kid. *Don't confuse the two*. Because he had already known and developed a firm understanding of pain, I thought it unlikely that he would confuse the two, now, later, ever—that we weren't what we did, our actions. Not at the end of the day, job done. No—just man, woman, child, brother, sister, mother, husband and flesh that wanted to be reminded of itself. *I am near, will always be, as long as I am able, you understand*. The right ones understood. She understood and the kid understood. *Tools*, I said, hefting the hammer, *don't need us, or want us*. The kid sat in the middle of the concrete floor wearing a rubber glove. He reached into a drain, felt around for missing bolts, washers. “Whatever I find is mine, right?”

Right, I said.

SEE YOU IN SHEOL

Worlds do die, necessarily,
 by agency of their parasites
 who with lances for reverence swing,
 pad larders, pack troves, defend unwinsome broods,
 toothy hordes, bowlegged ciphers;
 while down on them bear the White Reasoning Devils,
 with razor-sharp jawbones, prepared with Will
 to crimp iron in their fists,
 to rob of light and to pot the niggardly
 behind high walls, on soft knees
 under chintz in ivory cells...

...from the sea where were stacked the vanquished
 at ebb tide, behind bouncing cannons,
 wreathed in smoke, boots dusted with lime,
 to render dreaming man, to tear him from his twilight,
 by his rotting roots, to feast on his moral heart,
 to lash him with leathery fact,
 to bind him to dry boards under sunshine,
 to beat the damned with the long sharp edge of his own toys;
 to turn on the unscrupulous the spoils of his misadventures—
 to bash the impellers with their own secret object:
 stuff with the black gauze of their sanction of fraud
 their mealy spouts of superstition.

The myth-makers are quieted,
 their tongues plucked with the glowing tongs
 of their own First Principles.

From peak and plain storm the thieves of tomorrow,
 riding with giant fasces;
 soon, a brigand in every soft-lit window—
 the new praetorian neck-choppers,
 crushing pates with knotted bludgeons,
 leaving hanging with catgut from the bedsteads
 of the Bauble of Israel, doves with broken necks.
 Every cheek of every last Mediterranean lamb
 branded with a tiger crest.

Betwixt a violent totem,
 saber-bared legions on black horses
 from the ends of the fractured realm paved with governors;
 lands laid waste by Cleansing Grants,
 only savages spared the sword
 to dine on the fringe like carrion;
 to accelerate the aggregation of revering man...
 The migrations out of the Republics
 into the Territories cauterized by repelling hordes
 advancing before a Maginot of Fire—
 borderlands demarcated by smoldering charnel.

In the great and future territories
 is bred in children a want of blood,
 a taste for the vile and for the arbiter;
 an appetite for the soft, conciliating, tuft-bellied animals,
 intemperate and rotten-of-bone—
 the patrons of degeneration:
 the humanitarian must be devoured—
 lips, intestines and hides.

Marked is the postulator, the shepherd,
 the shearer, the dealer,
 the tanner, and the butcher;
 at whose blood in wooden saucers
 tomorrow's children will lap;
 and no mercy, no courtesy, will be shown them—
 no rude minds are spared the cleaver,
 no vulgar herds abandoned to the wastes,
 no infirm blight left to fester;
 for the bellowing mob, no delimiter
 to the will of man without superstition.

Over the feeble breakwater of the Decalogue,
 a torrent of rage washes, down-tumbled,
 and with it, ethical infernalisms,
 exterminated by plague of sea,
 hoodwinker's lungs filled with brine;
 with them, down into smoking vents, go their rafts of holly,
 their mongrel creed, their spells—

statesman weeds in an ineluctable vortex,
Sheol-bound.

No armistice.

There is no tenured Lamb.

The brute sleeps; he is not gone from the Earth.

He will wake yet to salt those

that would wring dividends from man-slaves,

then, too, into mince grind the man-slaves, the helots,

the flocking breeds weak-kneed for pittances.

THE MARROWBONE STAGE

I hoarded words like blocks,
stacked them atop one another,
and assigned to them meanings
that were lost to all but me.

I achieved with the sounds in my head
a semblance of order where there had been none,
when I became a function
in a blood torrent of intermingling senses
that spiraled up and up a tightly woven wick,
into and out of the thin membrane separating 'I' and 'Is.'

I could count on words
when I could count on nothing else,
words sounded out while on my back,
surrounded by tall ferns,
clouds tumbling end-over-end overhead.
And numbers, too, recited ritualistically—
an act too desperate to be a game—
the brain renegotiating itself,
actively separating from the world
with which it was not yet two:
an intentional series of acts...
to become a solid 'I.'

To become, to be, to be present,
was an act of will.
I observed my peers as though from behind Plexiglas,
could hear but not reach out and touch
the hems and sleeves, socked feet and exposed elbows.
They did not know
how loud in my head was the racket
of the word and numbers games...
I was too slow.
I was not becoming fast enough;
I would not assume my place in the world.
Integration could not be achieved
unless with a precise recitation of words

in combination with numbers
 I was able to pick a cosmic lock,
 sneak into life as by a back door.

I knew that this wasn't a sanctioned lifetime.
 Not for me.
 But though I was officially barred from participation,
 I might still break in,
 fashion a forbidden skeleton key
 from rodent bones,
 carve through trial and error the notches
 with which the puzzle could be solved.

And because I was prepared
 to whittle the key,
 I knew there was a lock,
 and by picking its pins
 and rolling the tumbler about its shear line,
 I would be permitted access.
 I would spring the latches by force-of-will
 and discharge into being.

I was not marshaled, picked up,
 straightened out, wound up, set in motion.
 My inception was outside of earthy rules,
 unframed, without order;
 I was a creature of sense, of touch,
 one of the lesser god's meek charges
 that would overcome his constraints,
 hold his breath and kick through airless cavities
 to the entrance-way of the puzzle,
 to pick Earth's tumbler lock;
 to rake the pins or die trying;
 to be alive among the Goldenrod,
 no mere watcher, with browning hands on the stems,
 no longer decumbent in worn red corduroys,
 under black palms, but ascending,
 anchored by masses of serrate leaf faces,
 I and they alike governed by absolute pressure.

Yes, it is a story of ascendance,
 out of confusion, disarray, a hard scramble,
 to probe for with fingers in a smooth black room,
purchase—edges into which to slide my hands...
 and pull; pull back the contoured walls,
 to slide out into cold pockets between concrete and rebar,
 to be a grappling spider before I could be a boy,
 to ascend to a high safe place
 from which to observe,
 before descending into a world of mashing boots—
 to be that which waits, barely breathing,
 lest I ne'er be whole.

Words once had rugged appeal to me, and numbers too,
 when I was unattached, unformed, not 'I.'
 I am able now to reach out and touch
 your bare feet, lips, hips, and strawberry vault;
 I am able to be an 'I' inside of you,
 not make a sound, nor count,
 nor flap oversize wings seeking thin thermals
 on which to rise out of cold, sunless divides.

You were numbers, a three-pointed star,
 and the blocks I held to my nose, cheeks, and forehead.
 You were blood and iron and skin
 that crackled and hissed, sizzled and spit,
 with racing blue trceries of photons...
 And there was nothing that I made
 that was not a whittled notch
 in the key with which I would un-puzzle
 the tumbler standing between my world and yours.

THE NORTH WIND

Craftsbury, no-man's land,
on a plateau above birch forests, an empty commons,
men carrying axes, women with children in rotting papooses.

A hard, fast drive east to 91, 91 to 55, 55 to 10,
10 over the St. Lawrence into old, old, *OLD* Montreal ...



She had descended into a fugue state
before passing through the fog-towns—
Niagara on the Lake, St. Catherines—high-beams on at noon,
the lake a debris-field of broken picture glass through the trees.

She knew what she wanted—
knew it when picking over trinkets,
ornaments in a gift shop
while the bells of Notre-Dame Basilica rang, rang, rang,
she turning over a bauble with a silver hook in her hands—
something for her great and future Christmas tree.
Not *our* Christmas tree.

A tree. Some tree. *Their* tree.
Something with a hook for something with a loop ...

Did you know about these trips to Canada?

To Kingston?

She—mute, prostrate on a bench by the lake, aching...
The Tragically Hip were in town, had been, would be again,
playing the Royal Military College—
a fading poster, one corner curling in the wind.

She was prostrate;
she didn't want to wander anymore,
or be with something that wandered, wasn't burred,
wouldn't send down steely roots, or couldn't quite yet.
She wasn't explicit, and she didn't need to be.

Oh, *Canada!*

Not eager to pass back over the border,
 over the line of scrimmage.
 I hear a wrist snap, armor colliding;
 the next play begins.
 First, though, buy a few bottles of ice wine,
 drink one, think about doubling back on the 401.
 She would need to get back over the border,
 back to the hospital, back to the unit,
 put her makeup on, go to the children's wing:
 the good clinician.

I wanted to go further North, home—
 north on the 400, but didn't say so.

She was quiet.
 There was less to say.
 Something in the engine was ticking.
 Under her feet—unfolded maps, broken jewel cases,
 a Styrofoam cup ('Styrofoam' with a capital 'S').

A cramped bed in a triangular room
 on Rue Saint-Denis, Saint-Laurent? One of the two.
 Over dinner, the sound of Velcro tearing ...



A ride in a carriage under blankets
 down Rue de la Commune,
 black barges in black water,
 shuttered concession stands.

Rolling over cobblestones, her life beginning,
 my Earthly life beginning to end;
 I could barely hear her through the music,
 the trilling, destiny's horns blowing hard, harder.

Once more, the sound of Velcro ...

“Velour et Crochet,” called the driver over his shoulder,
then whipped his horse.

ALEATORIC RISE: OR, *DADA SUCKS*

Tzara exhumed,
his body chopped ...

into

p | i | e | c | e | s

the

p | i | e | c | e | s

in a bag shaken,

shaken,

shaken out,

incus, malleus and stapes,
aloft in a high wind—

The dissimulator disassembled ...
Not by chance.

TRANSCENDENTAL FASCISM: TENETS AND PRINCIPLES OF CONDUCT UNDER THE STATE

VALUE/S AND ETHICS, PART I. - ELEVEN POINTS

Many tenets follow from acknowledgment of one simple truth: **The utility of paper money/currency is overstated.** Hence:

1. The gift will be a cornerstone of the Transcendental Fascist economy.
2. Value is subjective, and thus no two transactions are alike or of equal, determinant value.
3. No rewards or arbitrary value for equal work: If a soul is a natural producer, he will accrue to himself goods in proportion to the gifts or labor-as-gift he dispenses.
4. Value is not a function of time. Value is only discoverable in the novel exchange between two or more parties. Value, then, cannot be standardized; it cannot be predetermined.
5. Only when represented by paper does degenerate art appear to possess value. Value in these instances is manufactured at auction. The value of good work/s and art is intrinsic, it is universally discoverable, and it is universally valued by a culture. Good work/s resist denomination. Good work/s can't help but instruct technically and spiritually-it is without price, as it gives in perpetuity.
6. Shelter is not a privilege and will not convey status.
7. Like shelter, food is not a privilege. No man/household will accrue to himself/itself more rations than are his/its natural allotment. If one participates in its production, it is one's natural right to share or exchange for gifts whatever quantity of his foodstuffs one sees fit.
8. Under no circumstances will food or shelter or the effects thereof be taxed. The gift is exempt from taxation.
9. In instances when value is debased by representation with currency, which is inherently valueless, the offender is taxed through servitude to the community. The length of his service is determined by the community and is customarily proportional to the extent to which the gift-as-medium-of-exchange was displaced. A second debasement offense is a capital offense.

APPENDIX · A

10. Capital offenses are prosecuted by the State. If found guilty, the offender will be executed.
11. The State will intervene as a matter of course on the behalf of animals. Cruelty to animals is a capital offense and the offender will be executed.

POPULIST SOCIOLOGY OF LANGUAGE

To be populist does not necessitate that one appeal to the Totalist Regime's constituency with the adoption of a decayed vernacular; the regime's constituency must, by example, be encouraged to rise broadly and substantially. Hence, attention to parts of speech and spelling by that regime's spokespeople and propagandists is essential; each serves to legitimate the system's core values by invoking standards of intellectual comportment espoused by statesman and subject alike. This is the way that stultification in a formerly valueless, economized people is overcome, keeping always in mind:

Totalist core values are undermined by an active abridgement of language, as dissent is fomented through the practical exploitation of a population's learned proclivity to finance thought with base, provincial word combinations, shorthand and slang. In order to thrive, the Totalist Regime must eradicate what is base in a carryover culture's speech and to disabuse its constituency by the positive reformation of propaganda. Fundamentals are best conveyed when an exactness of word-meanings is pursued doggedly -- by the State, by the household and in the classroom. To the Totalist, and by extension, to the Transcendental Fascist, what relativizes in speech is spurious.

HOW DAVID DUFF AND HIS HANDLERS DID WHITE SUPREMACISM A FAVOR

White Supremacism/Nationalism is a marginal movement, residing on the fringes. In so far as this is true, it possess interstitial characteristics imposed upon it by its low, unstructured, non-institutional status, exhibited primarily in its visible members: paranoia, marginality, ostracization, and alienation from one's peers and family. Members do not enjoy the social stature and reinforcement enjoyed in other culturally sanctioned groups, like Rotary International or the Lion's Club. Where culturally sanctioned organizations are hierarchical and typified by orderliness, White Supremacist organizations are disorderly, anti-structural and horizontal -- leadership is unstable and transient; internal strife is common; distrust among members is rampant. And these are all characteristics of liminal subcultures. However, these selfsame characteristics impart advantages to a subculture, as isolation is imposed upon the groups of which it is comprised; they are forced to work from the margins, the shadows -- clandestinely -- and as long as isolation is imposed, a previously unattainable level of secrecy may be achieved.

David Duff's recent xxxxxx escapade was advantageous to White Supremacism generally and North American White Supremacism specifically; it has been driven further underground, out of the light and has inspired internal mole-hunts and purges that will ensure a level of solidarity hitherto unanticipated throughout the horizontal structure. For the public, the fate of White Supremacism becomes increasingly ambiguous and two-dimensional, which is beneficial: public-interest in the aggregate wanes and an untoward picture of 'Supremacists' emerges -- a conjured image that although inaccurate, additionally serves to conceal the face of the actual movement.

This was the strategy espoused by James A. Trainer shortly before his death, when it was all but certain that the fate of White Supremacist organizations lay in their becoming uncoupled from suspect leadership. The new mandate was a horizontal, leaderless structure, and for the sake of privacy, a new face would need to be projected for public consumption: *the Skinhead*. It was an exemplary diversionary tactic which enlisted the special talents of a select number of social engineers who worked assiduously to break down the unsettled cells of resistance that dotted the country, from West Virginia to Idaho. Trainer knew, though the strategy was not widely shared, that a

APPENDIX · B

movement of this nature could only operate in concealment -- the war for White peoples became a guerilla-style war, and its captains became chameleonic.

Trainer's purchase of xxxx Records was not, in actuality, an effort to appeal to a new, youthful audience -- would-be foot-soldiers. It was the most efficient means by which to put to death a failed strategy; to dismantle an organization that was, by its nature, anti-structural, asymmetric and interstitial. xxxx Records was a tongue-in-cheek coup de grâce for the Fascismo Movement (though it would persist in spirit), and for overt Baldrism. But once a front was in place, White Supremacism was able, once and for all, to go underground, where it could thrive, while 'above ground,' Neo-Nazis did -- unwittingly -- the bidding of the social engineer, upholding for the public the face that it believed represented the movement.

Ambiguity benefits some groups and it certainly benefits White Supremacism. For the last decade, obscurity has been carefully cultivated that the movement may proceed unmolested; White Supremacism has worked hard to project an aura of inconsequence, violence, racketeering, unscrupulousness in business, and anti-intellectualism. To work optimally, the movement had to be regularly and ritually discredited. The ADL and SPLC work, like Black Metal, tirelessly and unwittingly in this capacity; they are the Movement's best spokespeople. White Supremacism, in order to grow stronger, embraced the fringe; it let its weaker elements succumb to anti-structure and cliché. All publicity for the tattooed fronts was good publicity.

Denunciation and exposure have been the calculated aim of 21st century White Supremacism and denunciation and exposure have been the outcome. Do you see, then, why the acts of lone nuts, handled or not handled, always work in the favor of White Supremacism?

White Supremacism is necessarily an anti-structural movement. The attempt to institutionalize the movement in the 80s and 90s was its potential undoing. Failures on the behalf of leadership were corrected for and the tools once used against White Solidarity Movements were co-opted, studied, mastered, and reused against their enemies ... *successfully*. White Supremacism came of age and embraced its own marginal nature. It found funding from unlikely sources. Its members no longer shake hands in the streets. It came to the realization that only if consigned to the realm of gullibility and fraud, could it once more amass the type of concealed power that was its due. Its 'hoaxes'⁵¹

⁵¹ REFER TO APPENDIX C

APPENDIX · B

guarantee that the organization is protected from institutional examination.

THE POLITICS OF THE HOAX

UFOs attend marginal events, or appear during episodes of upheaval, chaos and disjointedness, when inhibition is low in a population, when disorderliness rules the day, when rational resistance is belated. Then, an unveiling occurs, when a collective's experience is most interstitial. It adopts the UFO or is made to adopt the UFO as the flag which represents an occurrence for which words are inadequate -- an event that undermines everyday expectations, when beliefs are uprooted. The image of the UFO may not originate in the group, the witness, but may be a projection from without, a concealment strategy by that force caught, so to speak, in an unguarded moment, or as a cloak that was presented intentionally in an effort to reinforce preconceived notions about something that is otherworldly. Though perceived as a disc or cigar-shaped dirigible or what Charles Fort referred to as 'superconstructions,' a UFO, in fact, may be none of those things. That is merely the impression that is left with the observer, the witness, the group.

Or the world truly is not as it appears, and some intervention takes place on a fairly regular basis -- an intervention from without -- and evidence of the illusion is presented, the projection mechanism revealed, but men know not what they see. They leap into the arms of a tried and true trope: the UFO. The notion of nuts-and-bolts spacecraft is then reinforced and the raw revelatory experience occluded totally.

Or the world is *exactly* as it appears, and one is party to a pernicious hoax, perpetrated by one's peers.



The effective hoax must be timely and must strike hard and fast; it must achieve an upper hand when the socio-cultural girdings by which a collective is bound are loosened, as by revolution, war, rapid technological change, or disease. It is chaos of which the hoax and the hoaxer must take advantage and its aims are almost always propagandistic. The hoax must at once appear substantial and supernatural, such that it will readily assume legendary status, conveyed orally, and most importantly, imperfectly. The hoax must quickly find endorsement. The endorsee must be considered reliable from a historical perspective and she must contribute to the hoax a

APPENDIX · C

handful of facts that may be verified when the hoax comes under scrutiny, as the hoaxes which are designed to endure inevitably do.

Hoaxes are a special type of deception. They are not required to possess a kernel of truth. In fact, unlike disinformation, the hoax is not typically designed to conceal so much as it is to distort or augment a preexisting worldview. Hence, its own premise may be a complete fabrication and it will continue to function as promised because it has been wrapped in, very often, an uncountable number of layers of facts, all of which are verifiable but unrelated to the event in question. The study of the facts alone ensures that the hoax remains a function of a culture for an extended period of time.

That being said, the hoax itself becomes less important over time, certainly less important than the facts in attendance. What remains of significance is the subtle change induced in a population by the hoax, though the change may not be an explicit one. Interestingly, it is the point at which an obsession with the facts diverges from the hoax from which they originated that the hoax is finally, effectively, mythologized. Once mythologized, it is safe to assume that opinion associated with some fundamental aspect of human affairs has been and will continue to be ... managed.

There is a word for this type of opinion management: queuing. The aim of queuing is predictability. In a systematically queued population, the outcome of the sum of most human action is known, even when adjusted for extreme outlying events. And the hoax is that method whereby which a host population's native and dynamic regard of the world is subverted and supplanted with trained expectation

JOHN SPRAGUE, *WITNESS*
AN AFTERWORD TO THE FOURTH EDITION OF *ORCHARD PARK*

If there is one thing I have learned, it is how little truth matters, and how little we care about whether or not we get it, or if we get justice at all. I typically settle for less than justice. I settle. I settle for bi-weekly payoffs from an NGO that ostensibly labors to rescue an untold number of young women from sexual slavery the world over. To its credit, the organization has hundreds of open cases on which as many employees work day and night, but to little effect. Upwards of 750,000 people (mostly women, and of whom, more than half are White) are trafficked across international borders. Almost all of them will serve as some sort of sex slave to the urban moneyed. For every slave freed, two more are dumped on the open market. It doesn't matter how good an NGO's website looks; despite what they say, they are treading water, swimming upstream, and in this context, even failure is profitable.

I hate it. Ten or twelve plus years ago, I was different. Better. Nicer. I swore on my life that I would not become an asshole. Tom Fahy was one of my witnesses. We sat in a Dupont Circle bar and I

said, "Shoot me if I become an asshole." Tom said, "Stay in this town and you don't have a chance." I didn't have a chance. "What are you going to do?" I asked him. He said, "I'm going to tell the truth."

He did. I didn't. I still don't. But now I have a reason to start. Two years after he first publishes it, I receive in the mail a copy of Tom's *Orchard Park*. I read the book, grow nervous, put it away, and try to forget about it. I can't forget about it. A handful of months pass and I give Tom a call, or try to. I can't get through, not to the old numbers. I send a letter and get no response. Another month passes and I get a call. It is Tom. "You did it," I say. "I think so," he replies. "But nobody knows what the hell it's about, do they?" He didn't respond. A painful minute later: "I'm in town," he says. "Let's get together." We do.

We meet that evening at Billy Martin's because that's what we used to do. Tom looks the same, almost identical, but a little tired. I know I don't look the same, but he doesn't mention it. I'm fat and I hate it. I talk about my family. Tom squints and talks about a book he is reading. We drink. Then we really talk.

"Thank you for not using my real name in the book," I say. He smiles, leans back in his chair and cackles loudly, almost maniacally. "I should have used your real name," he says.

"Have they caught up with you?" I ask him, by which I mean the usual dogs that intelligence typically sick on people that go off-reservation. He says yes, goes into some detail...

"The IRS, of course, but their ruse was pitiable." Tom actually talks this way. I am used to it. It is hard to get used to it. "I didn't make any money last year, and not much the year before. Nevertheless, they wanted me to pay almost thirty grand on an imaginary half-million in profits." More maniacal laughter. "And I no longer have any working phones. Ring, click, click, silence, new tone, click, new tone, ring..."

Funny. Sort of. Although I knew it wasn't really funny. I'm not sure the 21st century had been good to Tom. At any rate, it was surely worse than the late nineties had been. "You couldn't find an agent," I say. Tom's laughter was beginning to make me nervous. He pulled his hair away from his ears, took out his hearing aids and laid them on the bar. "Don't let me forget these," he says. "Too much feedback from the crowd. I can hear you."

“You can see me,” I say. Tom was one of the best lip-readers in the business. One whole summer he spent sitting behind a two-way mirror, no microphone, watching subjects, taking notes. And that’s all I’ll say. Sometimes the job picks you and sometimes you pick the job. Back in the day, the job picked Tom, then he quit and chose life. There is no redemption in the job. Don’t I know it. I’m a company man and I hate it. In the book, a little more than a third of the way through, Tom’s alter-ego Russell dashes off a letter to George Irwin in which he discusses two things: Quality & Anger. This was a deeply affecting piece of the puzzle for me. He says “...craft is a sorry excuse for the absence of quality...Quality assumes the role that craft cannot fulfill. ...Quality denotes honest effort—effort in the absence of artifice...” I paraphrase. Disconcerting stuff, however. “They cannot peacefully coexist,” I say to Tom, who is rubbing his eyes. “What can’t?” he says.

“From your book,” I say “Writing and craft. Quality and craft.”

He didn’t laugh this time. “Right,” he said.

This is what Tom says about ‘Anger’: “Behind every boxer’s punch there is intention, pure and true. It belongs to the fighter alone. It is rare that he discloses his secret to his opponent. His secret represents his strength and the longer it is withheld, the stronger he becomes. His secret swells in his arms and swarms in his ears; it makes his heart as large as an elephant’s; and as it pounds, it stirs the dead and explodes within his opponent’s ears. His anger is monolithic.”

Sitting there in Billy Martin’s, coasters and shot glasses spread out before us, I knew I was looking at a man that had saved up a lot of punches and had thrown them all at once. No one showed up for the fight. It was a knockout in the first round. His opponent still lay splayed out on the mat. He would lie there a long time. The only sound came from the juice surging to the flood-lamps above the ring. “How long are you going to stand there?” I ask Tom. “Where?” he asks. “In the ring,” I say. “As long as it takes,” he says. I believed him.

I *believe* him. *Orchard Park* is burning a hole through the bottom of a footlocker in a guest bedroom closet. It’s the only book in my possession that makes me nervous. Because I know what it is about. I was there.

My name is John Sprague and I am a witness.

